

DELL
FIRST
EDITION
B103

35¢

S-F

THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE-FICTION AND FANTASY

Edited by JUDITH MERRIL

Introduction by ORSON WELLES

Stories and Novelettes by

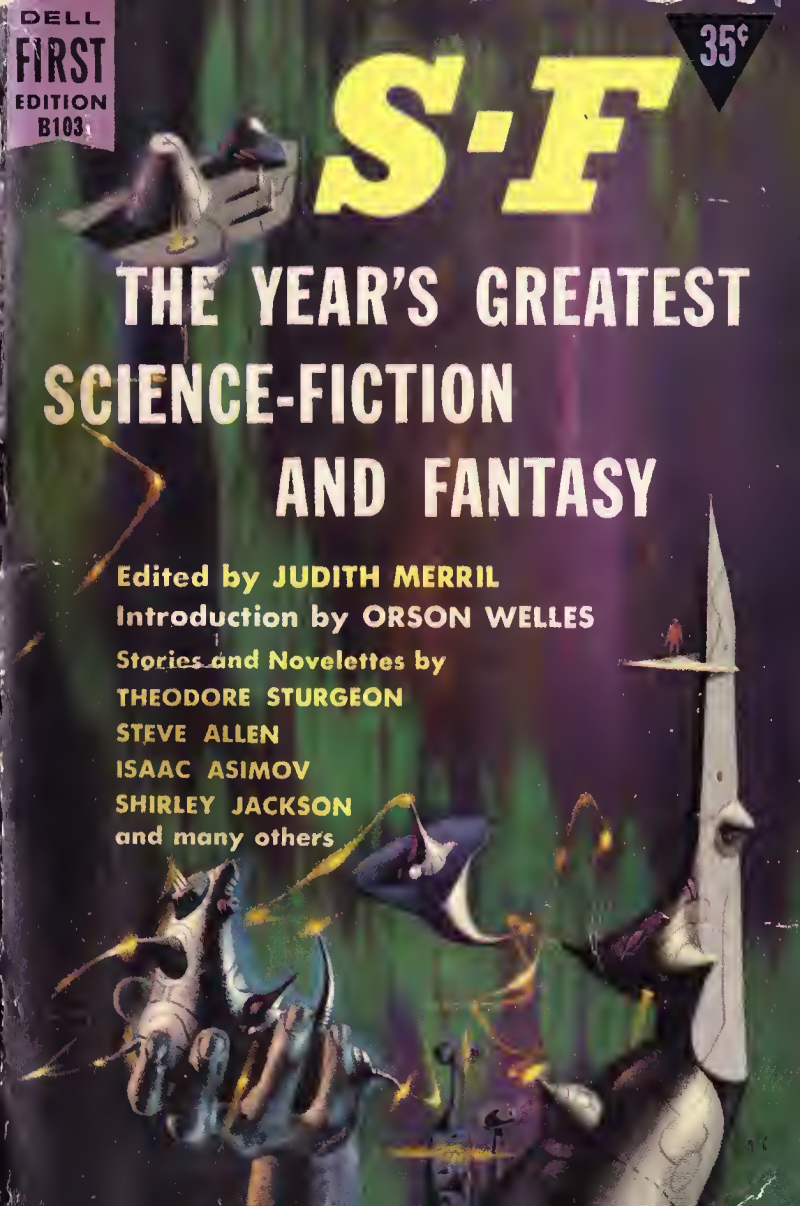
THEODORE STURGEON

STEVE ALLEN

ISAAC ASIMOV

SHIRLEY JACKSON

and many others



NOTHING BUT THE BEST!

Here are eighteen stories of science-fantasy, chosen from more than a thousand different pieces published during the past year, in this country and in England.

These stories are different: There is no "formula" for science-fantasy; it's got to be new to be good.

Each story is first-rate fiction, guaranteed by its inclusion in a book edited by Miss Judith Merril, whose previous anthologies have elicited this kind of enthusiastic comment:

"... perfectly amazing to find so good a collection . . ."

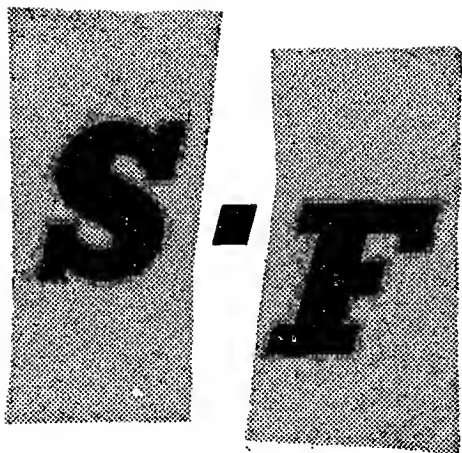
Saturday Review

"... another triumph for that peerless anthologist . . ."

New York Times

"Best value for the money ever offered in the field."

Chicago Sun-Times



**THE YEAR'S
GREATEST
SCIENCE-FICTION
and FANTASY**

STORIES AND NOVELETTES

Edited by
JUDITH MERRIL

Introduction by
ORSON WELLES

A DELL FIRST EDITION

Published by
DELL PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
261 Fifth Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

© 1956, by Judith Merrill. All rights reserved
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 56-8938

Cover painting by Richard Powers

Printed in U. S. A.

Acknowledgments

The following selections in this anthology are reproduced by permission of the authors and/or their publishers.

"The Stutterer" by R. R. Merliss; © 1955 by Street and Smith Publications, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"The Golem" by Avram Davidson; © 1955, by Fantasy House, Inc. Reprinted from **The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction: Fifth Series** (Doubleday, 1956). By permission of the Author and of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

"Junior" by Robert Abernathy; © 1955, by Galaxy Publishing Corp. By permission of the Author.

"The Cave Of Night" by James E. Gunn; © 1955, by Galaxy Publishing Corp. By permission of the Author.

"The Hooper" by Wolter M. Miller, Jr.; © 1955 by King Size Publications, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"Bulkhead" by Theodore Sturgeon; © 1955, by Theodore Sturgeon. Reprinted from **A Way Home** (Funk & Wagnolls Company, 1955). By permission of the Author.

"Sense From Thought Divide" by Mork Clifton; © 1955, by Street and Smith Publications, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"Pottage" by Zenno Henderson; © 1955, by Fantasy House, Inc. Reprinted from **The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction: Fifth Series** (Doubleday, 1956). By permission of the Author and of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

"Nobody Bothers Gus" by Algis Budrys; © 1955, by Street and Smith Publications, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"The Last Day Of Summer" by E. C. Tubb. By permission of the Author.

"One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts" by Shirley Jackson; © 1954, by Fantasy House, Inc. Reprinted from **The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction: Fifth Series** (Doubleday, 1956). By permission of the Author and of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

"The Ethicators" by Willard Morsh; © 1955, by Quinn Publishing Co., Inc. By permission of the Author.

"Birds Can't Count" by Mildred Clingerman; © 1954, by Fantasy House, Inc. Reprinted from **The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction: Fifth Series** (Doubleday, 1956). By permission of the Author and of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

"Of Missing Persons" by Jack Finney; © 1955, by Hearst Corporation. By permission of the Author.

"Dreaming Is A Private Thing" by Isaac Asimov; © 1955, by Fantasy House, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"The Country Of The Kind" by Damon Knight; © 1955, by Fantasy House, Inc. By permission of the Author.

"The Public Hating" by Steve Allen; © 1955, by Steve Allen. Reprinted from **Fourteen For Tonight** (Holt, 1955). By permission of the Author and of Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

"Home There's No Returning" by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore; © 1955 by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore. By permission of the Authors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> by Orson Welles .	8
<i>Preface</i> by Judith Merrill .	10
THE STUTTERER by R. R. Merliss . <i>From Astounding Science Fiction</i>	11
THE GOLEM by Avram Davidson <i>Fram Fantasy And Science Fiction</i>	42
JUNIOR by Robert Abernathy <i>From Galaxy Science Fiction</i>	49
THE CAVE OF NIGHT by James E. Gunn <i>From Galaxy Science Fiction</i>	58
THE HOOFER by Walter M. Miller, Jr. <i>From Fantastic Universe</i>	77
BULKHEAD by Theodore Sturgeon <i>Fram Galaxy Science Fiction, where it appeared under the title, "Who?"</i>	89
SENSE FROM THOUGHT DIVIDE by Mark Clifton <i>From Astounding Science Fictian</i>	125
POTTAGE by Zenna Henderson <i>From Fantasy ond Science Fictian</i>	162
NOBODY BOTHERS GUS by Algis Budrys <i>Fram Astounding Science Fictian, where it appeared under the pseudonym, "Paul Janvier."</i>	200

THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER by E. C. Tubb	216
<i>From Science Fantasy (British)</i>	
ONE ORDINARY DAY, WITH PEANUTS	
by Shirley Jackson . . .	226
<i>From Fantasy And Science Fiction</i>	
THE ETHICATORS by Willard Marsh .	238
<i>From If Magazine</i>	
BIRDS CAN'T COUNT by Mildred Clingerman	244
<i>From Fantasy And Science Fiction</i>	
OF MISSING PERSONS by Jack Finney	253
<i>From Good Housekeeping</i>	
DREAMING IS A PRIVATE THING by Isaac Asimov	270
<i>From Fantasy And Science Fiction</i>	
THE COUNTRY OF THE KIND by Damon Knight	288
<i>From Fantasy And Science Fiction</i>	
THE PUBLIC HATING by Steve Allen	304
<i>From Bluebook</i>	
HOME THERE'S NO RETURNING	
by Henry Kuttner & C. L. Moore .	312
<i>From "No Boundaries" (Ballantine, 1955)</i>	
THE YEAR'S S-F by Judith Merril .	343
<i>Summation and Honorable Mentions</i>	

INTRODUCTION

by
ORSON WELLES

ONE THING'S SURE about science-fiction: there's too much of it.

A leading editor in the field announces that the boom days are over, but the yearly amount of the stuff that still gets into print is pretty staggering.

My advice to any but the most bug-eyed addict would be to abstain from the novels. "S.F." is often at its aching worst in "book-length" versions. Good novels (Heinlein's "Puppet Masters," for instance) are about as rare as ambergris and a lot harder to identify. My wife, who loathes everything remotely galactic, who alternately yawns and shudders at the prospect of journeying in either time or outer space, and herself travels almost exclusively by train, went shopping with a publisher—a friend of ours who claims to be an "S.F." expert—and presented me on Christmas with an eight-foot shelf of this season's crop of the novels. Ploughing through the bulk of this brightly-jacketed little library only confirmed a previous opinion: one of the oddest aspects of this whole publishing phenomenon is that there still seems to be more outright claptrap between hard covers than soft, and that the short stories come off much better than the long ones.

Why? Well, I guess these tales are, after all, our modern fables and it's certain that the fable as a form generally succeeds when not too extended.

If there remains such a thing as a novice reader in this literature, my suggestion would be for him to begin with the magazines until he knows a few authors, and to steer clear of the bookstores. Against this, of course, our theoretical novice might happen on a poorish issue of whatever monthly he sampled first. An anthology is probably best

for a beginning, and I don't think he could do better than with this one.

For the real *aficionado*—he'll be relieved to find that he has nothing familiar from other collections to skip—I reckon he'll find most of his favorite authors, and these at the top of their form. The range is interestingly wide—from that convincing gadgetry dear to many of the fans, to the wildest and freest sort of nonsense. In this last area I join the enthusiasts. It's by bringing pure fantasy into currency that science-fiction makes its real and very healthy contribution to our popular literature, at least for my money.

I'm going to try to persuade my wife to read this book. There's a good hope that a first-rate sampler such as this may convert even her. If "S.F.—The Year's Greatest Science-Fiction and Fantasy" doesn't sell her on our twentieth-century fairy tales, she'll just have to stick with the Grimm brothers.

PREFACE

THE STORIES IN THIS BOOK, says Mr. Orson Welles, are fables of our time. I think this is a good way to describe them since, like older fables, science-fantasy makes use of the imaginative background and unusual circumstance to add emotional urgency and dramatic power to what are basically problems in philosophy and morality.

Unlike Aesop, the writers of these stories seldom conclude with a clear-cut moral. In a century whose most impressive accomplishments (atom bombs, orlon, rockets, radar, cancer cures, what-have-you-?) are built upon "scientific" concepts with such names as *relativity* and *the uncertainty principle*, the inquiring artist does well merely to formulate a coherent question.

The questions you will find most often put in here might be compressed in one composite query:—

How can we learn to live at peace with ourselves and with each other in the complexities of the world we are rebuilding with our new machines?

Fortunately, the stories are not so compressed. A good story must inevitably be unique and individual as the man or woman who wrote it. Unfortunately, if it's answers that you want, you will not find them here—except occasionally, prefaced with *what if?*, *I wonder*, or *supposing that . . .*

The serious-minded reader will also have to forgive our authors if they resort to the frivolities of space-ships and flying bath-mats, robots and talking rats, to make their points. Even in s-f, a writer is only secondarily a philosopher; his first big job is entertainment . . . and *that* hasn't changed since Aesop's time at all.

—J.M.

THE STUTTERER

by

R. R. Merliss

Right now, today, we can—and do—build machines that can think logically better and faster than we can. Others in our growing arsenal of tools can hear better, see farther, hit harder, last longer, remember more accurately. We have not yet built anything to live livelier, feel more strongly, or dream at all. We have not learned how to make a soul—yet.

"The Stutterer"—a first story, by the way, written by a Los Angeles physician—presents the problems (and tough ones they are) of an android, an artificial man, built to be as much as possible exactly like a human being—with just two very important differences. He is not fertile; he is indestructible.

OUT OF THE TWENTY only one managed to escape the planet. And he did it very simply, merely by walking up to the crowded ticket window at one of the rocket ports and buying passage to Earth. His Army identification papers passed the harassed inspection of the agent, and he gratefully and silently pocketed the small plastic stub that was handed him in exchange for his money.

He picked his way with infinite care through the hordes of ex-soldiers clamoring for passage back to the multitudinous planets from which they had come. Then he slowly climbed the heavy ramp into the waiting rocket.

He saw with relief that the seats were strongly constructed, built to survive the pressure of many gravities, and he chose one as far removed as possible from the other passengers.

He was still very apprehensive, and, as he waited for the rocket to take off, he tried hard to remember the principles of the pulse drive that powered the ship, and whether his additional weight would upset its efficiency enough to awaken suspicion.

The seats filled quickly with excited hurrying passengers. Soon he heard the great door clang shut, and saw the red light flicker on, warning of the take-off. He felt a slow surge of pressure as the ship arose from the ground, and his chair creaked ominously with the extra weight. He became fearful that it might collapse, and he strained forward trying to shift some of the pressure through his feet to the floor. He sat that way, tense and immobile, for what seemed a long time until abruptly the strain was relieved and he heard the rising and falling whine of the rockets that told him the ship was in pulse drive, flickering back and forth across the speed of light.

He realized that the pilots had not discovered his extra weight, and that the initial hazards were over. The important thing was to look like a passenger, a returning soldier like the others, so that no one would notice him and remember his presence.

His fellow travelers were by this time chatting with one another, some playing cards, and others watching the tele-depth screens. These were the adventurers who had flocked from all corners of the galaxy to fight in the first national war in centuries. They were the uncivilized few who had read about battle and armed struggle in their history books and found the old stories exciting.

They paid no attention to their silent companion who sat quietly looking through the quartz windows at the diamond-bright stars, tacked against the blackness of infinity.

The fugitive scarcely moved the entire time of the passage. Finally when Earth hung out in the sky like a blue balloon, the ship cut its pulsations and swung around for a tail landing.

The atmosphere screamed through the fins of the rocket, and the continents and the countries, and then the rivers

and the mountains took shape. The big ship settled down as gently as a snowflake, shuddered a few times and was quiet.

The passengers hurriedly gathered up their scattered belongings and pushed toward the exit in a great rush to be out and back on Earth.

The fugitive was the last to leave. He stayed well away from the others, being fearful that, if he should touch or brush up against someone, his identity might be recognized.

When he saw the ramp running from the ship to the ground, he was dismayed. It seemed a flimsy structure, supported only by tubular steel. Five people were walking down it, and he made a mental calculation of their weight—about eight hundred pounds he thought. He weighed five times that. The ramp was obviously never built to support such a load.

He hesitated, and then he realized that he had caught the eye of the stewardess waiting on the ground. A little panicky, he stepped out with one foot and he was horrified to feel the steel buckle. He drew back hastily and threw a quick glance at the stewardess. Fortunately at the moment she was looking down the field and waving at someone.

The ramp floor was supported by steel tubes at its edges and in its exact center. He tentatively put one foot in the middle over the support and gradually shifted his weight to it. The metal complained creakily, but held, and he slowly trod the exact center line to Earth. The stewardess' back was turned toward him as he walked off across the field toward the customhouse.

—He found it comforting to have under his feet what felt like at least one yard of cement. He could step briskly and not be fearful of betraying himself.

There was one further danger: the customs inspector.

He took his place at the end of the line and waited patiently until it led him up to a desk at which a uniformed man sat, busily checking and stamping declarations and

traveling papers. The official, however, did not even look up when he handed him his passport and identification.

"Human. You don't have to go through immigration," the agent said. "Do you have anything to declare?"

"N-no," the traveler said. "I d-didn't bring anything in."

"Sign the affidavit," the agent said and pushed a sheet of paper toward him.

The traveler picked up a pen from the desk and signed "Jon Hall" in a clear, perfect script.

The agent gave it a passing glance and tossed it into a wire basket.

Then he pushed his uniform cap back exposing a bald head. "You're my last customer for a while, until the rocket from Sirius comes in. Guess I might as well relax for a minute." He reached into a drawer of the desk and pulled out a package of cigarettes, of which he lit one.

"You been in the war, too?" he asked.

Hall nodded. He did not want to talk any more than he had to.

The agent studied his face.

"That's funny," he said after a minute. "I never would have picked you for one of these so-called adventurers. You're too quiet and peaceful looking. I would have put you down as a doctor or maybe a writer."

"N-no," Hall said. "I w-was in the war."

"Well, that shows you can't tell by looking at a fellow," the agent said philosophically. He handed Hall his papers. "There you are. The left door leads out to the copter field. Good luck on Earth!"

Hall pocketed the stamped documents. "Thanks," he said. "I'm glad to be here."

He walked down the wide station room to a far exit and pushed the door open. A few steps farther and he was standing on a cement path dug into a hillside.

Across the valley, bright in the noon sun lay the pine covered slopes of the Argus mountains, and at his feet the green Mojave flowering with orchards stretched far to the north and south. Between the trees, in the center of the

valley, the Sacramento River rolled southward in a man-made bed of concrete and steel giving water and life to what had a century before been dry dead earth.

There was a small outcropping of limestone near the cement walk, and he stepped over to it and sat down. He would have been happy to rest and enjoy for a few moments his escape and his triumph, but he had to let the others know so that they might have hope.

He closed his eyes and groped across the stars toward Grismet. Almost immediately he felt an impatient tug at his mind, strong because there were many clamoring at once to be heard. He counted them. There were seventeen. So one more had been captured since he had left Grismet.

"Be quiet," he told them. "I'll let you see, after a while. First I have to reach the two of us that are still free."

Obediently, the seventeen were still, and he groped some more and found another of his kind deep in an ice cave in the polar regions of Grismet.

"How goes it?" he asked.

The figure on Grismet lay stretched out at full length on the blue ice, his eyes closed. He answered without moving: "They discovered my radiation about an hour ago. Pretty soon, they'll start blasting through the ice."

The one on Earth felt the chill despair of his comrade and let go. He groped about again until he found the last one, the only other one left. He was squatting in the cellar of a warehouse in the main city of Grismet.

"Have they picked up your trail yet?" he asked.

"No," answered the one in the cellar. "They won't for a while. I've scattered depots of radiation all through the town. They'll be some time tracking them all down, before they can get to me."

In a flash of his mind, Hall revealed his escape and the one on Grismet nodded and said: "Be careful, Be very careful. You are our only hope."

Hall returned then to the seventeen, and he said with his thoughts: "All right, now you can look." Immobile in their darkness, they snatched at his mind, and as he opened

his eyes, they, too, saw the splendors of the mountains and the valley, the blue sky, and the gold sun high overhead.

The new man was young, only twenty-six. He was lean and dark and very enthusiastic about his work. He sat straight in his chair waiting attentively while his superior across the desk leafed through a folder.

"Jordan. Tom Jordan," the older man finally said. "A nice old Earth name. I suppose your folks came from there."

"Yes, sir," the new man said briskly.

The chief closed the folder.

"Well," he said, "your first job is a pretty important one."

"I realize that, sir," Jordan said. "I know it's a great responsibility for a man just starting with the Commission, but I'll give it everything I have."

The chief leaned back in his seat and scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"Normally we start a beginner like you working in a pair with an older man. But we just haven't got enough men to go around. There are eight thousand planets there"—he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder to a wall-sized map of the galaxy—"and we've got to cover every one. It seems reasonable that if he escaped this planet, he'll go to another that will by its atmosphere or its temperature give him some natural advantage over us—some place that is either burning hot or at absolute zero, or perhaps with a chlorine or sulfur dioxide atmosphere. That's why"—he hesitated a minute, but continued because he was a truthful man—"I picked you for Earth. It's the most populated of all the planets and it seems the least likely one that he would choose."

Jordan's face dropped a little bit when he heard the last piece of information, but he said: "I understand, sir, and if he's there, I'll bring him back."

The chief slouched farther back in his seat. He picked up a shard of rubidium that served as a paper weight and toyed with it.

"I guess you know most of the facts. They are made out of permallium. Have you ever seen any of the stuff?"

The new man shook his head. "I read about it though—some new alloy, isn't it?"

"Plenty new. It's the hardest stuff anybody has ever made. If you set off one hundred successive atom blasts over a lump of permallium, you might crystallize and scale maybe a micron off the surface. It will stand any temperature or pressure we can produce. That just means there's no way to destroy it."

Jordan nodded. He felt a little honored that the chief was giving him this explanation in person rather than just turning him over to one of the scientific personnel for a briefing. He did not understand that the old man was troubled and was talking the situation through as much for his own sake as for anyone else's.

"That's the problem," the chief continued. "Essentially an indestructible machine with a built-in source of power that one can't reach. It had to be built that way—a war instrument, you know."

He stopped and looked squarely at the bright young man sitting across the desk. "This lousy war. You'd think the human race would grow up some time, wouldn't you?" He filled a pipe with imported Earth tobacco and lit it, and took a few deep puffs. "There's something else. I don't know how they do it, but they can communicate with one another over long distances. That made them very useful for military purposes.

"They are loyal to one another, too. They try to protect each other and keep one another from being captured. Do you find that surprising?"

The question caught Jordan unprepared. "Well, yes. It is, kind of—" he said. "They are only machines."

The chief closed his eyes for a moment. He seemed tired.

"Yes," he repeated, "they are only machines. Anyway, we don't know everything about them, even yet. There are still a few secret angles, I think. The men who could tell us are either dead or in hiding.

"There's one fact though that gives us a great advantage. Their brain"—he stopped on the word and considered it—"I mean their thinking apparatus gives off a very penetrating short-wave length radiation which you can pick up on your meters anywhere in a radius of two thousand miles, and you can locate the source accurately if you get within fifty miles.

"The only real problem you'll have in finding them is the confusion created by illegal atomic piles. You'd be surprised how many of them we have turned up recently. They are owned by private parties and are run illegally to keep from paying the tax on sources of power. You have to track those down, but once you get them labeled it will be clear sailing."

He stopped to take a few puffs on his pipe.

"Don't try to be a hero," he said after a few moments. "Don't get close to the thing you are hunting. None of them yet has injured any of us, but if one should want to, he could crush you to death with two fingers. Use the permallium nets and net bombs if you locate him."

He tamped his pipe out. "Well, that's it," he said.

The new man arose. "I want you to know that I appreciate the trust you have put in me."

"Sure, sure," the chief said, but it was not unfriendly. "Do you like the job?"

"It is a great opportunity," Jordan said, and he meant it.

"What do you think about what we do to them after we capture them?"

The new man shrugged. "I suppose it's the only thing to do. It's not as though they were human."

"Yeah," the chief said. "I guess so. Anyway, good luck."

Jordan arose and shook the chief's hand. However, just as he was stepping through the door, his superior asked him another question. "Did you know that one of them stutters?"

He turned back, puzzled. "Stutters? Why should he stutter? How could that be?"

The chief shook his head and started cleaning out his

pipe.

"I don't know for sure. You'd better get started." He sat back in his seat and watched the back of the new man as he disappeared through the doorway.

That young fellow has a lot to learn, he thought to himself. But even so, maybe he's better off than I am. Maybe I've had too much experience. Maybe too much experience puts you back where you started from. You've done the wrong thing so many times and profited so many times from your mistakes that you see errors and tragedies in everything.

He was depressed, and he did something that usually made him feel better again. He reached under the edge of his desk and pulled a little switch that made the galactic map on the wall light up in three-dimensional depth, then he swung around in his chair so he could see it. Eight thousand planets that his race had conquered, eight thousand planets hundreds of light-years apart. Looking at the map gave him a sense of accomplishment and pride in humanity which even a stupid war and its aftermath could not completely destroy.

Jon Hall, the fugitive, walked along the highway leading south from the rocket port. There was very little traffic, only an occasional delivery truck carrying meat or groceries. The real highway was half a mile overhead where the copters shuttled back and forth up and down the state in neat orderly layers.

The seventeen were inside his head, looking through his eyes, and feasting on the blueness of the sky, and the rich green vegetation that covered the fertile fields. From time to time they talked to him, giving advice, asking questions, or making comments, but mostly they looked, each knowing that the hours of their sight might be very few.

After walking a while, Hall became aware of someone's footsteps behind him. He stopped suddenly in apprehension and swung around. A dozen or so paces away was a red-headed boy of about ten or eleven, dressed in plastic overalls, and carrying a basket of ripe raspberries. The

stains about his mouth showed that not all the raspberries were carried in the basket.

Hall's anxiety faded, and he was glad to see the child. He had hoped to meet someone who was not so old to become suspicious, but old enough to give him directions.

He waited for the lad to catch up.

"Hello," the boy said. "I've been walking behind you most of a mile, but I guess you didn't hear me."

"It looks as though you've been p-p-picking raspberries," Hall said.

"Yup. My dad owns a patch by the river. Want some?" He proffered the basket.

"No, thank you," Hall answered. He resumed his walk up the highway with the boy at his side.

"D-do you live around here?" he asked.

"Just up the road a ways." The lad studied his companion for a minute. "You stutter, don't you?"

"A little."

"There was a boy in my class who used to stutter. The teacher said it was because he thought so far ahead of what he said he got all tangled up." The boy reached in his basket for a handful of berries and chewed them thoughtfully. "She was always after him to talk slower, but I guess it didn't do any good. He still stutters."

"Is there a p-power plant around here?" Hall asked. "You know, where the electricity comes from."

"You mean the place where they have the nu-nuclear fission"—the boy stumbled on the unfamiliar word, but got it out—"and they don't let you in because you get poisoned or something?"

"Yes, I think that's it."

"There are two places. There's one over at Red Mountain and another over at Ballarat."

"Where are they?"

"Well—" The boy stopped to think. "Red Mountain's straight ahead, maybe ten miles, and Ballarat's over there"—he pointed west across the orange groves—"maybe fifteen miles."

"Good," Hall said. "Good." And he felt glad inside of himself. Maybe it could be done, he thought.

They walked along together. Hall sometimes listening to the chattering of the boy beside him, sometimes listening to and answering the distant voices of the seventeen. Abruptly, a few hundred yards before the house that the boy had pointed out as his father's, a small sports car whipped down the highway, coming on them almost without warning. The lad jumped sideways, and Hall, to avoid touching him, stepped off the concrete road. His leg sank into the earth up to the midcalf. He pulled it out as quickly as he could.

The boy was looking at the fast retreating rear of the sports car.

"Gee," he said. "I sure didn't see them coming." Then he caught sight of the deep hole alongside the road, and he stared at it. "Gosh, you sure made a footprint there," he said wonderingly.

"The ground was soft," Hall said. "C-come along."

But instead of following, the boy walked over to the edge of the road and stared into the hole. He tentatively stamped on the earth around it. "This ground isn't soft," he said. "It's hard as a rock." He turned and looked at Hall with big eyes.

Hall came close to the boy and took hold of his jacket. "D-don't pay any attention to it, son. I just stepped into a soft spot."

The boy tried to pull away. "I know who you are," he said. "I heard about you on the teledepth."

Suddenly, in the way of children, panic engulfed him and he flung his basket away and threw himself back and forth, trying to tear free. "Let me go," he screamed. "Let me go. Let me go."

"Just l-listen to me, son," Hall pleaded. "Just listen to me. I won't hurt you."

But the boy was beyond reasoning. Terror stricken, he screamed at the top of his voice, using all his little strength to escape.

"If you p-promise to l-listen to me, I'll let you go," Hall said.

"I promise," the boy sobbed, still struggling.

But the moment Hall let go of his coat, he tore away and ran as fast as he could over the adjacent field.

"W-wait—don't run away," Hall shouted. "I won't hurt you. Stay where you are. I couldn't follow you anyway. I'd sink to my hips."

The logic of the last sentence appealed to the frightened lad. He hesitated and then stopped and turned around, a hundred feet or so from the highway.

"L-listen," said Hall earnestly. "The teledepths are wrong. They d-didn't tell you the t-truth about us. I d-don't want to hurt anyone. All I n-need is a few hours. D-don't tell anyone for j-just a few hours and it'll be all right." He paused because he didn't know what to say next.

The boy, now that he seemed secure from danger had recovered his wits. He plucked a blade of grass from the ground and chewed on an end of it, looking for all the world like a grownup farmer thoughtfully considering his fields. "Well, I guess you could have hurt me plenty, but you didn't," he said. "That's something."

"Just a few hours," Hall said. "It won't take long. Y-you can tell your father tonight."

The boy suddenly remembered his raspberries when he saw his basket and its spilled contents on the highway.

"Why don't you go along a bit," he said. "I would like to pick up those berries I dropped."

"Remember," Hall said, "just a few hours." He turned and started walking again toward Red Mountain. Inside his mind, the seventeen asked anxiously, "Do you think he'll give the alarm? Will he report your presence?"

Back on the highway, the boy was gathering the berries back into his basket while he tried to make his mind up.

Jordan reached Earth atmosphere about two o'clock in the afternoon. He immediately reported in to the Terrestrial police force, and via the teledepth screen spoke with a bored lieutenant. The lieutenant, after listening to

Jordan's account of his mission, assured him without any particular enthusiasm of the willingness of the Terrestrial forces to coöperate, and of more value, gave him the location of all licensed sources of radiation in the western hemisphere.

The galactic agent set eagerly to work, and in the next several hours uncovered two unlisted radiation sources, both of which he promptly investigated. In one case, north of Eugene, he found in the backyard of a metal die company a small atomic pile. The owner was using it as an illegal generator of electricity, and when he saw Jordan snooping about with his detection instruments, he immediately offered the agent a sizable bribe. It was a grave mistake since Jordan filed charges against him, via teledepth, not only for evading taxes, but also for attempted bribery.

The second strike seemed more hopeful. He picked up strong radiation in a rather barren area of Montana; however when he landed he found that it was arising from the earth itself. From a short conversation with the local authorities, he learned that the phenomenon was well known: an atomic fission plant had been destroyed at that site during the Third World War.

He was flying over the lovely blue water of Lake Bonneville, when his teledepth screen flickered. He flipped the switch on and the lieutenant's picture flooded in.

"I have a call I think you ought to take," the Earth official said. "It seems as though it might be in your line. It's from a sheriff in a small town in California. I'll have the operator plug him in."

Abruptly the picture switched to that of a stout red-faced man wearing the brown uniform of a county peace officer.

"You're the galactic man?" the sheriff asked.

"Yes. My name is Tom Jordan," Jordan said.

"Mine's Berkhammer." It must have been warm in California because the sheriff pulled out a large handkerchief and mopped his brow. When he was done with that he blew his nose loudly. "Hay fever," he announced.

"Want to see my credentials?"

"Oh sure, sure," the sheriff hastily replied. He scrutinized the card and badge that Jordan displayed. After a moment, he said, "I don't know why I'm looking at those. They might be fakes for all I know. Never saw them before and I'll probably never see them again."

"They're genuine."

"The deuce with formality," the sheriff said heavily. "There's some kid around here who thinks he saw that . . . that machine you're supposed to be looking for."

"When was that?" Jordan asked.

"About four hours ago. Here, I'll let you talk to him yourself." He pulled his big bulk to one side, and a boy and his father walked into the picture. The boy was red-eyed, as though he had been crying. The father was a tall, stoop-shouldered farmer, dressed like his son in plastic overalls.

The sheriff patted the boy on the back. "Come on, Jimmy. Tell the man what you saw."

"I saw him," the boy said sullenly. "I walked up the highway with him."

Jordan leaned forward toward the screen.

"How did you know who he was?"

"I knew because when he stepped on the ground, he sank into it up to his knee. He tried to say the ground was soft, but it was hard. I know it was hard."

"Why did you wait so long to tell anybody?" Jordan asked softly.

The boy looked at him with defiance and dislike in his eyes and kept his small mouth clamped shut.

His father nudged him roughly in the ribs.

"Answer the man," he commanded.

Jimmy looked down at his shoes.

"Because he asked me not to tell for a while," he said curtly.

"Stubborn as nails," the father said not without pride in his voice. "Got more loyalty to a lousy machine than to the whole human race."

"Which way did he go, Jimmy?"

"Toward Red Mountain. I think maybe to the power house. He asked me where it was."

"What do you think he wants with that?" the sheriff asked of Jordan.

Jordan shrugged and shook his head.

"Maybe it's all in the kid's head," the sheriff suggested. "These wild teleddepth programs they look at give them all kinds of ideas."

"It isn't in my head," Jimmy said violently. "I saw him. He stepped on the ground and stuck his foot into it. I talked to him. And I know something else. He stutters."

"What?" said the sheriff. "Now I know you're lying."

The father started dragging the boy by the arm. "Come on home, Jimmy. You got one more licking coming."

Jordan, however, was sure the boy was not lying. "Leave him alone," he said. "He's right. He did see him." He took a fast look at the timepiece on his panel board. "I'll be down in an hour and a half. Wait for me."

He flicked the switch off, and kicked up the motors. The ship shot southward almost as rapidly as a projectile.

He had topped the Sierras and had just turned into the great central valley of California when, with the impact of a blow, a frightening thought occurred to him.

He flicked the screen on again, and he caught the sheriff sitting behind his desk industriously scratching himself in one armpit.

"Listen," Jordan said, speaking very fast. "You've got to send out a national alarm. You must get every man you can down to the power plant. You've got to stop him from getting in."

The sheriff stopped scratching himself and stared at Jordan.

"What are you so het up about, young man?"

"Do it, and do it now," Jordan almost shouted. "He'll tear the pile apart and let the hafnium go off. It'll blow half the state off the planet."

The sheriff was unperturbed. "Mr. Star boy," he said sarcastically, "any grammar school kid knows that if some-

one came within a hundred yards of one of those powerhouse piles, he'd burn like a match stick. And besides why would he want to blow himself to pieces?"

"He's made out of permallium." Jordan was shouting now.

The sheriff suddenly grew pale. "Get off my screen. I'm calling Sacramento."

Jordan set the ship for maximum speed, well beyond the safety limit. He kept peering ahead into the dusk, momentarily fearful that the whole countryside would light up in one brilliant flash. In a few minutes he was sweating and trembling with the tension.

Over Walnut Grove, he recognized the series of dams, reservoirs and water-lifts where the Sacramento was raised up out of its bed and turned south. For greater speed, he came close to Earth, flying at emergency height, reserved ordinarily for police, firemen, doctors and ambulances. He set his course by sight following the silver road of the river, losing it for ten or fifteen miles at a time where it passed through subterranean tunnels, picking it up again at the surface, always shooting south as fast as the atmosphere permitted.

At seven thirty, when the sun had finally set, he sighted the lights of Red Mountain, and he cut his speed and swung in to land. There was no trouble picking out the power plant; it was a big dome-shaped building surrounded by a high wall. It was so brilliantly lit up, that it stood out like a beacon, and there were several hundred men milling about before it.

He settled down on the lawn inside the walls, and the sheriff came bustling up, a little more red in the face than usual.

"I've been trying to figure for the last hour what the devil I would do to stop him if he decided to come here," Berkhammer said.

"He's not here then?"

The sheriff shook his head. "Not a sign of him. We've gone over the place three times."

Jordan settled back in relief, sitting down in the open

doorway of his ship. "Good," he said wearily.

"Good!" the sheriff exploded. "I don't know whether I'd rather have him show up or not. If this whole business is nothing more than the crazy imagination of some kid who ought to get tanned and a star-cop with milk behind his ears, I'm really in the soup. I've sent out an alarm and I've got the whole state jumping. There's a full mechanized battalion of state troops waiting in there." He pointed toward the power plant. "They've got artillery and tanks all around the place."

Jordan jumped down out of the ship. "Let's see what you've got set up here. In the meantime, stop fretting. I'd rather see you fired than vaporized along with fifty million other people."

"I guess you're right there," Berkhammer conceded, "but I don't like to have anyone make a fool out of me."

At Ballarat, an old man, Eddie Yudovich, was the watchman and general caretaker of the electrical generation plant. Actually, his job was a completely unnecessary one, since the plant ran itself. In its very center, buried in a mine of graphite were the tubes of hafnium, from whose nuclear explosions flowed a river of electricity without the need of human thought or direction.

He had worked for the company for a long time and when he became crippled with arthritis, the directors gave him the job so that he might have security in his latter years.

Yudovich, however, was a proud old man, and he never once acknowledged to himself or to anyone else that his work was useless. He guarded and checked the plant as though it were the storehouse of the Terrestrial Treasury. Every hour punctually, he made his rounds through the building.

At approximately seven thirty he was making his usual circuit when he came to the second level. What he discovered justified all the years of punctilious discharge of his duties. He was startled to see a man kneeling on the floor, just above where the main power lines ran. He had torn a

hole in the composition floor, and as Yudovich watched, he reached in and pulled out the great cable. Immediately the intruder glowed in the semidarkness with an unearthly blue shine and sparkles crackled off of his face, hands and feet.

Yudovich stood rooted to the floor. He knew very well that no man could touch that cable and live. But as he watched, the intruder handled it with impunity, pulling a length of wire out of his pocket and making some sort of a connection.

It was too much for the old man. Electricity was obviously being stolen. He roared out at the top of his voice, and stumped over to the wall where he threw the alarm switch. Immediately, a hundred arc lights flashed on, lighting the level brighter than the noon sun, and a tremendously loud siren started wailing its warning to the whole countryside.

The intruder jumped up as though he had been stabbed. He dropped the wires, and after a wild look around him, he ran at full speed toward the far exit.

"Hold on there," Yudovich shouted and tried to give chase, but his swollen, crooked knees almost collapsed with the effort.

His eyes fell on a large wrench lying on a worktable, and he snatched it up and threw it with all his strength. In his youth he had been a ball player with some local fame as a pitcher, and in his later life, he was addicted to playing horseshoes. His aim was, therefore, good, and the wrench sailed through the air striking the runner on the back of the head. Sparks flew and there was a loud metallic clang, the wrench rebounding high in the air. The man that was struck did not even turn his head, but continued his panicky flight and was gone in a second.

When he realized there was no hope of effecting a capture, Yudovich stumped over to see the amount of the damage. A hole had been torn in the floor, but the cable itself was intact.

Something strange caught his attention. Wherever the intruder had put his foot down, there were many radiating

cracks in the composition floor, just as though someone had struck a sheet of ice with a sledge hammer.

"I'll be danged," he said to himself. "I'll be danged and double danged."

He turned off the alarm and then went downstairs to the teledepth screen to notify the sheriff's office.

A few hundred yards from the powerhouse, Jon Hall stood in the darkness, listening to the voices of his fellows. There were eighteen of them, not seventeen, for a short while before the one in the ice cave had been captured, and they railed at him with a bitter hopeless anger.

He looked toward the bright lights of the powerhouse, considering whether he should return. "It's too late," said one of them. "The alarm is already out." "Go into the town and mix with the people," another suggested. "If you stay within a half mile of the hafnium pile, the detection man will not be able to pick up your radiation and maybe you will have a second chance."

They all assented in that, and Hall, weary of making his own decisions turned toward the town. He walked through a tree-lined residential street, the houses with neatly trimmed lawns, and each with a copter parked on the roof. In almost every house the teledepths were turned on and he caught snatches of bulletins about himself: ". . . Is known to be in the Mojave area." ". . . About six feet in height and very similar to a human being. When last seen, he was dressed in—" "Governor Leibowitz has promised speedy action and attorney general Markle has stated—"

The main street of Ballarat was brilliantly lighted. Many of the residents, aroused by the alarm from the powerhouse, were out, standing in small groups in front of the stores and talking excitedly to one another.

He hesitated, unwilling to walk through the bright street, but uncertain where to turn. Two men talking loudly came around the corner suddenly and he stepped back into a store entrance to avoid them. They stopped directly in front of him. One of them, an overalled farm hand from his looks, said, "He killed a kid just a little

while ago. My brother-in-law heard it."

"Murderer," the other said viciously.

The farmer turned his head and his glance fell on Hall. "Well, a new face in town," he said after a moment's inspection. "Say I bet you're a reporter from one of the papers, aren't you?"

Hall came out of the entrance and tried to walk around the two men, but the farmer caught him by the sleeve.

"A reporter, huh? Well, I got some news for you. That thing from Grismet just killed a kid."

Hall could restrain himself no longer.

"That's a lie," he said coldly.

The farmer looked him up and down.

"What do you know about it," he demanded. "My brother-in-law got it from somebody in the state guard."

"It's still a lie."

"Just because it's not on the teledepth, you say it's a lie," the farmer said belligerently. "Not everything is told on the teledepth, Mr. Wiseheimer. They're keeping it a secret. They don't want to scare the people."

Hall started to walk away, but the farmer blocked his path.

"Who are you anyway? Where do you live? I never saw you before," he said suspiciously.

"Aw, Randy," his companion said, "don't go suspecting everybody."

"I don't like anyone to call me a liar."

Hall stepped around the man in his path, and turned down the street. He was boiling inside with an almost uncontrollable fury.

A few feet away, catastrophe suddenly broke loose. A faulty section of the sidewalk split without warning under his feet and he went pitching forward into the street. He clutched desperately at the trunk of a tall palm tree, but with a loud snap, it broke, throwing him head on into a parked road car. The entire front end of the car collapsed like an eggshell under his weight.

For a long moment, the entire street was dead quiet.

With difficulty, Hall pulled himself to his feet. Pale, astonished faces were staring at him from all sides.

Suddenly the farmer started screaming. "That's him. I knew it. That's him." He was jumping up and down with excitement.

Hall turned his back and walked in the other direction. The people in front of him faded away, leaving a clear path.

He had gone a dozen steps when a man with a huge double-barreled shotgun popped out from a store front just ahead. He aimed for the middle of Hall's chest and fired both barrels.

The blast and the shot struck Hall squarely, burning a large hole in his shirt front. He did not change his pace, but continued step by step.

The man with the gun snatched two shells out of his pocket and frantically tried to reload. Hall reached out and closed his hand over the barrel of the gun and the blue steel crumpled like wet paper.

From across the street, someone was shooting at him with a rifle. Several times a bullet smacked warmly against his head or his back.

He continued walking slowly up the street. At its far end several men appeared dragging a small howitzer—probably the only piece in the local armory. They scurried around it, trying to get it aimed and loaded.

"Fools. Stupid fools," Hall shouted at them.

The men could not seem to get the muzzle of the gun down, and when he was a dozen paces from it they took to their heels. He tore the heavy cannon off of its carriage and with one blow of his fist caved it in. He left it lying in the street broken and useless.

Almost as suddenly as it came, his anger left him. He stopped and looked back at the people cringing in the door ways.

"You poor, cruel fools," Hall said again.

He sat down in the middle of the street on the twisted howitzer barrel and buried his head in his hands. There was nothing else for him to do. He knew that in just a

matter of seconds, the ships with their permallium nets and snares would be on him.

Since Jordan's ship was not large enough to transport Jon Hall's great weight back to Grismet, the terrestrial government put at the agent's disposal a much heavier vessel, one room of which had been hastily lined with permallium and outfitted as a prison cell. A pilot by the name of Wilkins went with the ship. He was a battered old veteran, given to cigar smoking, clandestine drinking and card playing.

The vessel took off, rose straight through the atmosphere for about forty miles, and then hung, idly circling Earth, awaiting clearance before launching into the pulse drive. A full course between Earth and Grismet had to be plotted and cleared by the technicians at the dispatch center because the mass of the vessel increased so greatly with its pulsating speed that if any two ships passed within a hundred thousand miles of each other, they would at least be torn from their course, and might even be totally destroyed.

Wilkins had proposed a pinochle game, and he and Jordan sat playing in the control room.

The pilot had been winning and he was elated. "Seventy-six dollars so far," he announced after some arithmetic. "The easiest day's pay I made this month."

Jordan shuffled the cards and dealt them out, three at a time. He was troubled by his own thoughts, and so preoccupied that he scarcely followed the game.

"Spades, again," the pilot commented gleefully. "Well, ain't that too bad for you." He gave his cigar a few chomps and played a card.

Jordan had been looking out of the window. The ship had tilted and he could see without rising the rim of Earth forming a beautiful geometric arc, hazy and blue in its shimmering atmosphere.

"Come on, play," the pilot said, impatiently. "I just led an ace."

Jordan put down his cards. "I guess I better quit," he

said.

"What the devil!" the pilot said angrily. "You can't quit like that in the middle of a deal. I got a flush and aces."

"I'm sorry," Jordan said, "but I'm going to lie down in my cabin until we are given clearance."

He opened the door of the little room and went into the hall. He walked down past his own cabin and stopped in front of another door, a new one that was sheathed in permallium. He hesitated a few moments; then he snapped open the outside latch and walked in, letting the door swing closed behind him.

Hall lay unmoving in the middle of the floor, his legs and arms fastened in greaves of permallium.

Jordan was embarrassed. He did not look directly at the robot.

"I don't know whether you want to talk to me or not," he started. "If you don't want to, that's all right. But, I've followed you since you landed on Earth, and I don't understand why you did what you did. You don't have to tell me, but I wish you would. It would make me feel better."

The robot shrugged—a very human gesture, Jordan noted.

"G-go ahead and ask me," he said. "It d-doesn't make any difference now."

Jordan sat down on the floor. "The boy was the one who gave you away. If not for him, no one would have ever known what planet you were on. Why did you let the kid get away?"

The robot looked straight at the agent. "Would you kill a child?" he asked.

"No, of course not," Jordan said a little bit annoyed, "but I'm not a robot either." He waited for a further explanation, but when he saw none was coming, he said: "I don't know what you were trying to do in that powerhouse at Ballarat, but, whatever it was, that old man couldn't have stopped you. What happened?"

"I l-lost my head," the robot said quietly. "The alarm and the lights rattled me, and I got into a p-panic."

"I see," said Jordan, frustrated, not really seeing at all. He sat back and thought for a moment. "Let me put it this way. Why do you stutter?"

Hall smiled a wry smile. "Th-that used to be a m-military secret," he said. "It's our one weakness—the one Achilles heel in a m-machine that was meant to be invulnerable."

He struggled to a sitting position. "You see, we were m-made as s-soldiers and had to have a certain loyalty to the country that m-made us. Only living things are loyal—machines are not. We had to think like human beings."

Jordan's brows contracted as he tried to understand the robot.

"You mean you have a transplanted human brain?" he asked incredulously.

"In a way," Hall said. "Our b-brains are permallium strips on which the mind of some human donor was m-magnetically imprinted. My mind was copied f-from a man who stuttered and who got panicky when the going got rough, and who couldn't kill a child no matter what was at s-stake."

Jordan felt physically ill. Hall was human and he was immortal. And according to galactic decree, he, like his fellows, was to be manacled in permallium and fixed in a great block of cement, and that block was to be dropped into the deep silent depths of the Grismet ocean, to be slowly covered by the blue sediment that gradually filters down through the miles of ocean water to stay immobile and blind for countless millions of years.

Jordan arose to his feet. He could think of nothing further to say.

He stopped, however, with the door half open, and asked: "One more question—what did you want with the electrical generator plants on Earth?"

Slowly and without emotion Hall told him, and when he understood, he became even sicker.

He went across to his cabin and stood for a while looking out the window. Then he lit a cigarette and lay down on his bunk thinking. After a time, he put out the cigarette and walked into the hall where he paced up and down.

As he passed the cell door for about the tenth time, he suddenly swung around and lifted the latch and entered. He went over to the robot, and with a key that he took from his pocket, he unlocked the greaves and chains.

"There's no point in keeping you bound up like this," he said. "I don't think you're very dangerous." He put the key back in his pocket.

"I suppose you know that this ship runs on an atomic pile," he said in a conversational tone of voice. "The cables are just under the floor in the control room and they can be reached through a little trap door."

Jordan looked directly into Hall's face. The robot was listening with great intentness.

"Well," the agent said, "we'll probably be leaving Earth's atmosphere in about fifteen minutes. I think I'll go play pinochle with the pilot."

He carefully left the door of the cell unlatched as he left. He walked to the control room and found Wilkins, a dry cigar butt clenched between his teeth, absorbed in a magazine.

"Let's have another game," Jordan said. "I want some of that seventy-six dollars back."

Wilkins shook his head. "I'm in the middle of a good story here, Real sexy. I'll play you after we take off."

"Nothing doing," Jordan said sharply. "Let's play right now."

Wilkins kept reading. "We got an eighteen-hour flight in front of us. You have lots of time."

The agent snatched the magazine out of his hands. "We're going to play right now in my cabin," he said.

"You quit when I have aces and a flush, and now you come back and want to play again. That's not sportsman-like," Wilkins complained, but he allowed himself to be led back to Jordan's cabin. "I never saw anybody so upset

about losing a miserable seventy-six bucks," was his final comment.

The robot lay perfectly still until he heard the door to Jordan's cabin slam shut, and then he arose as quietly as he could and stole out into the hall. The steel of the hall floor groaned, but bore his weight, and carefully, trembling with excitement inside of his ponderous metallic body, he made his way to the control room. He knelt and lifted the little trap door and found the naked power cable, pulsating with electrical current.

In a locker under the panel board he found a length of copper wire. It was all he needed for the necessary connection.

Since his capture, his fellows on Grismet had been silent with despair, but as he knelt to close the circuit, their minds flooded in on him and he realized with a tremendous horror that there were now nineteen, that all except he had been bound and fixed in their eternal cement prisons.

"We are going to have our chance," he told them. "We won't have much time, but we will have our chance."

He closed the circuit and a tremendous tide of electric power flowed into his head. Inside that two inch shell of permallium was a small strip of metal tape on whose electrons and atoms were written the borrowed mind of a man. Connected to the tape was a minute instrument for receiving and sending electromagnetic impulses—the chain by which the mind of one robot was tied to that of another.

The current surged in and the tiny impulses swelled in strength and poured out through the hull of the ship in a great cone that penetrated Earth's atmosphere in a quadrant that extended from Baffin Land to Omaha, and from Hawaii to Labrador. The waves swept through skin and bone and entered the sluggish gelatinous brain of sentient beings, setting up in those organs the same thoughts and pictures that played among the electrons of the permallium strip that constituted Jon Hall's mind.

All nineteen clamored to be heard, for Hall to relay their voices to Earth, but he held them off and first he told his story.

The Cassiopeian delegate to the Galactic Senate was at the moment finishing his breakfast. He was small and furry, not unlike a very large squirrel, and he sat perched on a high chair eating salted roast almonds of which he was very fond.

Suddenly a voice started talking inside of his head, just as it did at that very second inside the heads of thirteen billion other inhabitants of the northwest corner of Earth. The Cassiopeian delegate was so startled that he dropped the dish of almonds, his mouth popping open, his tiny red tongue inside flickering nervously. He listened spell-bound.

The voice told him of the war on Grismet and of the permallium constructed robots, and of the cement blocks. This, however, he already knew, because he had been one of the delegates to the Peace Conference who had decided to dispose of the robots. The voice, however, also told him things he did not know, such as the inability of the robots to commit any crime that any other sane human being would not commit, of their very simple desire to be allowed to live in peace, and most of all of their utter horror for the fate a civilized galaxy had decreed for them.

When the voice stopped, the Cassiopeian delegate was a greatly shaken little being.

Back on the ship, Hall opened the circuit to the nineteen, and they spoke in words, in memory pictures and in sensations.

A copter cab driver was hurrying with his fare from Manhattan to Oyster Bay. Suddenly, in his mind, he became a permallium robot. He was bound with cables of the heavy metal, and was suspended upside down in a huge cement block. The stone pressed firmly on his eyes, his ears, and his chest. He was completely immobile, and

worst of all, he knew that above his head for six miles lay the great Grismet Ocean, with the blue mud slowly settling down encasing the cement in a stony stratum that would last till the planet broke apart.

The cab driver gasped: "What the hell." His throat was so dry he could scarcely talk. He turned around to his fare, and the passenger, a young man, was pale and trembling.

"You seeing things, too?" the driver asked.

"I sure am," the fare said unsteadily. "What a thing to do."

For fifteen minutes, over the northwest quadrant of Earth, the words and the pictures went out, and thirteen billion people knew suddenly what lay in the hearts and minds of nineteen robots.

A housewife in San Rafael was at the moment in a butcher shop buying meat for her family. As the thoughts and images started pouring into her mind, she remained stock-still, her package of meat forgotten on the counter. The butcher, wiping his bloodied hands on his apron froze in that position, an expression of horror and incredulity on his face.

When the thoughts stopped coming in, the butcher was the first to come out of the trancelike state.

"Boy," he said, "that's sure some way of sending messages. Sure beats the teledepts."

The housewife snatched her meat off the counter. "Is that all you think of?" she demanded angrily.

"That's a terrible thing that those barbarians on Grismet are doing to those . . . those people. Why didn't they tell us that they were human." She stalked out of the shop, not certain what she would do, but determined to do something.

In the ship Hall reluctantly broke off the connection and replaced the trap door. Then he went back to his

cell and locked himself in. He had accomplished his mission; its results now lay in the opinions of men.

Jordan left the ship immediately on landing, and took a copter over to the agency building. His conversation with his superior was something he wanted to get over with as soon as possible.

The young woman at the secretary's desk looked at him coldly and led him directly into the inner office. The chief was standing up in front of the map of the galaxy, his hands in his pockets, his eyes an icy blue.

"I've been hearing about you," he said without a greeting.

Jordan sat down. He was tense and jumpy but tried not to show it. "I suppose you have," he said, adding, after a moment, "Sir."

"How did that robot manage to break out of his cell and get to the power source on the ship in the first place?"

"He didn't break out," Jordan said slowly. "I let him out."

"I see," the chief said, nodding. "You let him out. I see. No doubt you had your reasons."

"Yes, I did. Look—" Jordan wanted to explain, but he could not find the words. It would have been different if the robots' messages had reached Grismet; he would not have had to justify himself then. But they had not, and he could not find a way to tell this cold old man of what he had learned about the robots and their unity with men. "I did it because it was the only decent thing to do."

"I see," the chief said. "You did it because you have a heart." He leaned suddenly forward, both hands on his desk. "It's good for a man to have a heart and be compassionate. He's not worth anything if he isn't. But"—and he shook his finger at Jordan as he spoke—"that man is going to be compassionate at his own expense, not at the expense of the agency. Do you understand that?"

"I certainly do," Jordan answered, "but you have me wrong if you think I'm here to make excuses or to apologize. Now, if you will get on with my firing, sir, I'll go

home and have my supper."

The chief looked at him for a long minute. "Don't you care about your position in the agency?" he asked quietly.

"Sure I do," Jordan said almost roughly. "It's the work I wanted to do all my life. But, as you said, what I did, I did at my own expense. Look, sir, I don't like this any better than you do. Why don't you fire me and let me go home? Your prisoner's safely locked up in the ship."

For answer the chief tossed him a stellogram. Jordan glanced at the first few words and saw that it was from Galactic Headquarters on Earth. He put it back on the desk without reading it through.

"I know that I must have kicked up a fuss. You don't have to spell it out for me."

"Read it," the chief said impatiently.

Jordan took back the stellogram and examined it. It read:

To: Captain Lawrence Macrae Detection Agency, Grismet.

From: Prantal Aminopteris Delegate from Cassiopeia
Chairman, Grismet Peace Committee of the Galactic Senate.

Message: You are hereby notified that the committee by a vote of 17-0 has decided to rescind its order of January 18, 2214, directing the disposal of the permallium robots of Grismet. Instead, the committee directs that you remove from their confinement all the robots and put them in some safe place where they will be afforded reasonable and humane treatment.

The committee will arrive in Grismet some time during the next month to decide on permanent disposition.

Jordan's heart swelled as he read the gram. "It worked," he said. "They have changed their minds. It won't be so bad being discharged now." He put the paper back on the desk and arose to go.

The chief smiled and it was like sunlight suddenly flooding over an arctic glacier. "Discharged? Now who's

discharging you? I'd sooner do without my right arm."

He reached in a desk drawer and pulled out a bottle of old Earth bourbon and two glasses. He carefully poured out a shot into each glass, and handed one to Jordan.

"I like a man with a heart, and if you get away with it, why then you get away with it. And that's just what you've done."

He sat down and started sipping his whisky. Jordan stood uncertainly above him, his glass in his hand.

"Sit down, son," the old man said. "Sit down and tell me about your adventures on Earth."

Jordan sat down, put his feet on the desk and took a sizable swallow of his whisky.

"Well, Larry," he started, "I got into Earth atmosphere about 2:40 o'clock—"

THE GOLEM

by

Avram Davidson

Dr. Merliss, a practicing professional man of science, was of course primarily concerned with the soul and psyche of his incredible machine.

This next story was written by another new writer, who is also a devout student of religion, mediaevalism, alchemy, the occult, and sheep-raising. Mr. Davidson has an android too; but he naturally concerns himself much more deeply with the practical uses of the marvellous invention under ordinary everyday circumstances.

THE GRAY-FACED PERSON came along the street where old Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner lived. It was afternoon, it was autumn, the sun was warm and soothing to their ancient bones. Anyone who attended the movies in the twenties or the early thirties has seen that street a thousand times. Past these bungalows with their half-double roofs Edmund Lowe walked arm-in-arm with Leatrice Joy and Harold Lloyd was chased by Chinamen waving hatchets. Under these squamous palm trees Laurel kicked Hardy and Woolsey beat Wheeler upon the head with codfish. Across these pocket-handkerchief-sized lawns the juveniles of the Our Gang Comedies pursued one another and were pursued by angry fat men in golf knickers. On this same street—or perhaps on some other one of five hundred streets exactly like it.

Mrs. Gumbeiner indicated the gray-faced person to her husband.

"You think maybe he's got something the matter?" she asked. "He walks kind of funny, to me."

"Walks like a *golem*," Mr. Gumbeiner said indifferently. The old woman was nettled.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I think he walks like your cousin, Mendel."

The old man pursed his mouth angrily and chewed on his pipestem. The gray-faced person turned up the concrete path, walked up the steps to the porch, sat down in a chair. Old Mr. Gumbeiner ignored him. His wife stared at the stranger.

"Man comes in without a hello, goodbye, or how are you, sits himself down and right away he's at home. . . . The chair is comfortable?" she asked. "Would you like maybe a glass tea?"

She turned to her husband.

"Say something, Gumbeiner!" she demanded. "What are you, made of wood?"

The old man smiled a slow, wicked, triumphant smile.

"Why should I say anything?" he asked the air. "Who am I? Nothing, that's who."

The stranger spoke. His voice was harsh and monotonous. "When you learn who—or, rather, what—I am, the flesh will melt from your bones in terror." He bared porcelain teeth.

"Never mind about my bones!" the old woman cried. "You've got a lot of nerve talking about my bones!"

"You will quake with fear," said the stranger. Old Mrs. Gumbeiner said that she hoped he would live so long. She turned to her husband once again.

"Gumbeiner, when are you going to mow the lawn?"

"All mankind—" the stranger began.

"*Shah!* I'm talking to my husband. . . . He talks *eppis* kind of funny, Gumbeiner, no?"

"Probably a foreigner," Mr. Gumbeiner said, complacently.

"You think so?" Mrs. Gumbeiner glanced fleetingly at the stranger. "He's got a very bad color in his face, *nebbich*. I suppose he came to California for his health."

"Disease, pain, sorrow, love, grief—all are nought to—"

Mr. Gumbeiner cut in on the stranger's statement.

"Gall bladder," the old man said. "Guinzburg down at the *shule* looked exactly the same before his operation. Two professors they had in for him, and a private nurse day and night."

"I am not a human being!" the stranger said loudly.

"Three thousand seven hundred fifty dollars it cost his son, Guinzburg told me. 'For you, Poppa, nothing is too expensive—only get well,' the son told him."

"*I am not a human being!*"

"Ai, is that a son for you!" the old woman said, rocking her head. "A heart of gold, pure gold." She looked at the stranger. "All right, all right, I heard you the first time. Gumbeiner! I asked you a question. When are you going to cut the lawn?"

"On Wednesday, *odder* maybe Thursday, comes the Japaneser to the neighborhood. To cut lawns is *his* profession. *My* profession is to be a glazier—retired."

"Between me and all mankind is an inevitable hatred," the stranger said. "When I tell you what I am, the flesh will melt—"

"You said, you said already," Mr. Gumbeiner interrupted.

"In Chicago where the winters were as cold and bitter as the Czar of Russia's heart," the old woman intoned, "you had strength to carry the frames with the glass together day in and day out. But in California with the golden sun to mow the lawn when your wife asks, for this you have no strength. Do I call in the Japaneser to cook for you supper?"

"Thirty years Professor Allardyce spent perfecting his theories. Electronics, neuronics—"

"Listen, how educated he talks," Mr. Gumbeiner said, admiringly. "Maybe he goes to the University here?"

"If he goes to the University, maybe he knows Bud?" his wife suggested.

"Probably they're in the same class and he came to see him about the homework, no?"

"Certainly he must be in the same class. How many classes are there? Five *in ganzen*: Bud showed me on his program card." She counted off on her fingers. "Television Appreciation and Criticism, Small Boat Building, Social Adjustment, The American Dance The American Dance—nu, Gumbeiner—"

"Contemporary Ceramics," her husband said, relishing the syllables, "A fine boy, Bud. A pleasure to have him for a boardner."

"After thirty years spent in these studies," the stranger, who had continued to speak unnoticed, went on, "he turned from the theoretical to the pragmatic. In ten years' time he had made the most titanic discovery in history: he made mankind, *all* mankind, superfluous: he made *me*."

"What did Tillie write in her last letter?" asked the old man.

The old woman shrugged.

"What should she write? The same thing. Sidney was home from the Army, Naomi has a new boy friend—"

"*He made ME!*"

"Listen, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," the old woman said; "maybe where you came from is different, but in *this* country you don't interrupt people the while they're talking. . . . Hey. Listen—what do you mean, he *made* you? What kind of talk is that?"

The stranger bared all his teeth again, exposing the too-pink gums.

"In his library, to which I had a more complete access after his sudden and as yet undiscovered death from entirely natural causes, I found a complete collection of stories about androids, from Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Capek's *R.U.R.* to Asimov's—"

"Frankenstein?" said the old man, with interest. "There used to be Frankenstein who had the soda-wasser place on Halstead Street: a Litvack, *nebbich*."

"What are you talking?" Mrs. Gumbeiner demanded. "His name was Frankenthal, and it wasn't on Halstead, it was on Roosevelt."

"—clearly shown that all mankind has an instinctive

antipathy towards androids and there will be an inevitable struggle between them—"

"Of course, of course!" Old Mr. Gumbeiner clicked his teeth against his pipe. "I am always wrong, you are always right. How could you stand to be married to such a stupid person all this time?"

"I don't know," the old woman said. "Sometimes I wonder, myself. I think it must be his good looks." She began to laugh. Old Mr. Gumbeiner blinked, then began to smile, then took his wife's hand.

"Foolish old woman," the stranger said; "why do you laugh? Do you not know I have come to destroy you?"

"What!" old Mr. Gumbeiner shouted. "Close your mouth, you!" He darted from his chair and struck the stranger with the flat of his hand. The stranger's head struck against the porch pillar and bounced back.

"When you talk to my wife, talk respectable, you hear?"

Old Mrs. Gumbeiner, cheeks very pink, pushed her husband back in his chair. Then she leaned forward and examined the stranger's head. She clicked her tongue as she pulled aside the flap of gray, skin-like material.

"Gumbeiner, look! He's all springs and wires inside!"

"I told you he was a *golem*, but no, you wouldn't listen," the old man said.

"You said he *walked* like a *golem*."

"How could he walk like a *golem* unless he *was* one?"

"All right, all right. . . . You broke him, so now fix him."

"My grandfather, his light shines from Paradise, told me that when MoHaRaL—Moreynu Ha-Rav Löw—his memory for a blessing, made the *golem* in Prague, three hundred? four hundred years ago? he wrote on his forehead the Holy Name."

Smiling reminiscently, the old woman continued, "And the *golem* cut the rabbi's wood and brought his water and guarded the ghetto."

"And one time only he disobeyed the Rabbi Löw, and Rabbi Löw erased the *Shem Ha-Mephorash* from the *golem's* forehead and the *golem* fell down like a dead one. And they put him up in the attic of the *shule* and he's still

there today if the Communisten haven't sent him to Moscow. . . . This is not just a story," he said.

"*Avadda not!*" said the old woman.

"I myself have seen both the *shule* and the rabbi's grave," her husband said, conclusively.

"But I think this must be a different kind *golem*, Gumbainer. See, on his forehead: nothing written."

"What's the matter, there's a law I can't write something there? Where is that lump clay Bud brought us from his class?"

The old man washed his hands, adjusted his little black skullcap, and slowly and carefully wrote four Hebrew letters on the gray forehead.

"Ezra the Scribe himself couldn't do better," the old woman said, admiringly. "Nothing happens," she observed, looking at the lifeless figure sprawled in the chair.

"Well, after all, am I Rabbi Löw?" her husband asked, deprecatingly. "No," he answered. He leaned over and examined the exposed mechanism. "This spring goes here . . . this wire comes with this one . . ." The figure moved. "But this one goes where? And this one?"

"Let be," said his wife. The figure sat up slowly and rolled its eyes loosely.

"Listen, Reb *Golem*," the old man said, wagging his finger. "Pay attention to what I say—you understand?"

"Understand . . ."

"If you want to stay here, you got to do like Mr. Gumbainer says."

"Do-like-Mr.-Gumbainer-says . . ."

"*That's* the way I like to hear a *golem* talk. Malka, give here the mirror from the pocketbook. Look, you see your face? You see on the forehead, what's written? If you don't do like Mr. Gumbainer says, he'll wipe out what's written and you'll be no more alive."

"No-more-alive . . ."

"*That's* right. Now, listen. Under the porch you'll find a lawnmower. Take it. And cut the lawn. Then come back. Go."

"Go . . ." The figure shambled down the stairs. Presently

the sound of the lawnmower whirled through the quiet air in the street just like the street where Jackie Cooper shed huge tears on Wallace Beery's shirt and Chester Conklin rolled his eyes at Marie Dressler.

"So what will you write to Tillie?" old Mr. Gumbeiner asked.

"What should I write?" old Mrs. Gumbeiner shrugged. "I'll write that the weather is lovely out here and that we are both, Blessed be the Name, in good health."

The old man nodded his head slowly, and they sat together on the front porch in the warm afternoon sun.

JUNIOR

by

Robert Abernathy

Abernathy is a problem. He doesn't write enough, because he has another serious hobby—photography—and spends most of his spare time—nine to five daily—working in classified research for the U.S. Government. Perhaps it is just as well that he doesn't turn out more fiction; he's enough of an irritation now—if you happen to be an editor collecting the “best of the year”—because almost everything he does write belongs in that category.

Most notable this year was a short sharp piece called “Single Combat” (very different indeed from the bubbling good humor of “Junior”). It is listed with its source in the back of this book, in the Honorable Mentions, along with a number of other stories we could not include in a single volume, but which you may wish to find and read for yourself.

“JUNIOR!” bellowed Pater.

“Junior!” squeaked Mater, a quavering echo.

“Strayed off again—the young idiot! If he's playing in the shallows, with this tide going out . . .” Pater let the sentence hang blackly. He leaned upslope as far as he could stretch, angrily scanning the shoreward reaches where light filtered more brightly down through the murky water, where the sea-surface glistened like bits of broken mirror.

No sign of Junior.

Mater was peering fearfully in the other direction, to-

ward where, as daylight faded, the slope of the coastal shelf was fast losing itself in green profundity. Out there, beyond sight at this hour, the reef that loomed sheltering above them fell away in an abrupt cliffhead, and the abyss began.

"Oh, oh," sobbed Mater. "He's lost. He's swum into the abyss and been eaten by a sea monster." Her slender stem rippled and swayed on its base, and her delicate crown of pinkish tentacles trailed disheveled in the pull of the ebbtide.

"Pish, my dear!" said Pater. "There are no sea monsters. At worst," he consoled her stoutly, "Junior may have been trapped in a tidepool."

"Oh, oh," gulped Mater. "He'll be eaten by a land monster."

"There ARE no land monsters!" snorted Pater. He straightened his stalk so abruptly that the stone to which he and Mater were conjugally attached creaked under them. "How often must I assure you, my dear, that WE are the highest form of life?" (And, for his world and geologic epoch, he was quite right.)

"Oh, oh," gasped Mater.

Her spouse gave her up. "JUNIOR!" he roared in a voice that loosened the coral along the reef.

Round about, the couple's bereavement had begun attracting attention. In the thickening dusk tentacles paused from winnowing the sea for their owners' suppers, stalked heads turned curiously here and there in the colony. Not far away a threesome of maiden aunts, rooted en brosse to a single substantial boulder, twittered condolences and watched Mater avidly.

"Discipline!" growled Pater. "That's what he needs! Just wait till I—"

"Now, dear—" began Mater shakily.

"Hi, folks!" piped Junior from overhead.

His parents swiveled as if on a single stalk. Their offspring was floating a few fathoms above them, paddling lazily against the ebb; plainly he had just swum from some crevice in the reef nearby. In one pair of dangling

tentacles he absently hugged a roundish stone, worn sensuously smooth by pounding surf.

"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?"

"Nowhere," said Junior innocently. "Just playing hide-and-go-sink with the squids."

"With the other *polyps*," Mater corrected him primly. She detested slang.

Pater was eyeing Junior with ominous calm. "And where," he asked, "did you get that stone?"

Junior contracted guiltily. The surfstone slipped from his tentacles and plumped to the sea-floor in a flurry of sand. He edged away, stammering, "Well, I guess maybe . . . I might have gone a little ways toward the beach . . ."

"You guess! When I was a polyp," said Pater, "the small fry obeyed their elders, and no guess about it!"

"Now, dear—" said Mater.

"And no spawn of mine," Pater warmed to his lecture, "is going to flout my words! Junior . . . COME HERE."

Junior paddled cautiously round the homesite just out of tentacle-reach. He said in a small voice, "I won't."

"DID YOU HEAR ME?"

"Yes," admitted Junior.

The neighbors stared. The three maiden aunts clutched one another with muted shrieks, savoring beforehand the language Pater would now use.

But Pater said "Ulp!"—no more.

"Now, dear," put in Mater quickly. "We must be patient. You know all children go through larval stages."

"When I was a polyp . . ." Pater began rustily. He coughed out an accidentally inhaled crustacean, and started over: "No spawn of mine . . ." Trailing off, he only glared, then roared abruptly, "SPRAT!"

"I won't!" said Junior reflexively, and backpaddled into the coral shadows of the reef.

"That wallop," seethed Pater, "wants a good polyping. I mean—" He glowered suspiciously at Mater and the neighbors.

"Dear," soothed Mater, "didn't you *notice* . . .?"

"OF COURSE I— Notice what?"

"What Junior was doing. Carrying a stone. I don't suppose he understands why, just yet, but . . ."

"A stone? Ah, uh, to be sure, a stone. Why . . . Why, my dear, do you realize what this MEANS?"

Pater was once more occupied with improving Mater's mind. It was a long job, without foreseeable end—especially since he and his helpmeet were both firmly rooted for life to the same tastefully decorated homesite (garished by Pater himself with colored pebbles, shells, urchins, and bits of coral in the rather rococo style which had prevailed during Pater's courting days as a free-swimming polyp).

"Intelligence, my dear," pronounced Pater, "is quite incompatible with motility. Just think—how could ideas congeal in a brain shuttled hither and yon, bombarded with ever-changing sense-impressions? Look at the lower species, which swim about all their lives, incapable of taking root or thought! True Intelligence, my dear—as distinguished from Instinct, of course—presupposes the fixed viewpoint!"

He paused. Mater murmured, "Yes, dear," as she always did at this point.

Junior undulated past, swimming toward the abyss. He moved a bit heavily now; it was growing hard for him to keep his maturely thickening afterbody in a horizontal posture.

"Just look at the young of our own kind," said Pater. "Scatterbrained larvae, wandering greedily about in search of new stimuli. But, praise be, they mature at last into sensible, sessile adults. While yet the unformed intellect rebels against the ending of carefree polyphood, instinct, the wisdom of Nature, instructs them to prepare for the great change!"

He nodded wisely as Junior came gliding back out of the gloom of deep water. Junior's tentacles clutched an irregular basalt fragment which he must have picked up down the rubble-strewn slope. As he paddled slowly along the rim of the reef, the adult anthozoans located directly

below looked up and hissed irritable warnings. He was swimming a bit more easily now, and, if Pater had not been a firm believer in Instinct, he might have been reminded of the grossly materialistic theory, propounded by some iconoclast, according to which a maturing polyp's tendency to grapple objects was merely a matter of taking on ballast.

"Seel" declared Pater triumphantly. "I don't suppose he understands *why*, just yet . . . but Instinct urges him infallibly to assemble the materials for his future homesite."

Junior let the rock fragment fall, and began plucking restlessly at a coral outcropping.

"Dear," said Mater, "don't you think you ought to tell him . . .?"

"Ahem!" said Pater. "The wisdom of Instinct—"

"As you've always said, a polyp needs a parent's guidance," remarked Mater.

"Ahem!" repeated Pater. He straightened his stalk and bellowed authoritatively, "JUNIOR! Come here!"

The prodigal polyp swam warily close. "Yes, Pater?"

"Junior," said his parent solemnly, "now that you are growing up, it behooves you to know certain facts."

Mater blushed a delicate lavender and turned away on her side of the rock.

"Very soon now," said Pater, "you will begin feeling an irresistible urge . . . to sink to the bottom, to take root there in some sheltered location which will be your life-time site. Perhaps you even have an understanding already with some—ah—charming young polyp of the opposite gender, whom you would invite to share your homesite. Or, if not, you should take all the more pains to make that site as attractive as possible, in order that such a one may decide to grace it with—"

"Uh-huh," said Junior understandingly. "That's what the fellows mean when they say any of 'em'll fall for a few high-class rocks."

Pater marshaled his thoughts again. "Well, quite apart from such material considerations as selecting the right rocks, there are certain—ah—matters we do not ordinarily

discuss."

Mater blushed a more pronounced lavender. The three maiden aunts, rooted to their boulder within easy earshot of Pater's carrying voice, put up a respectable pretense of searching one another for water-fleas.

"No doubt," said Pater, "in the course of your harum-scarum adventurings as a normal polyp among polyps, you've noticed the ways in which the lower orders reproduce themselves—the activities of the fishes, the crustacea, the marine worms will not have escaped your attention."

"Uh-huh," said Junior, treading water.

"You will have observed that among these there takes place a good deal of—ah—maneuvering for position. But among intelligent, firmly rooted beings like ourselves, matters are of course on a less crude and direct plane. What among lesser creatures is a question of tactics belongs, for us, to the realm of strategy." Pater's tone grew confiding. "Now, Junior, once you're settled, you'll realize the importance of being easy in your mind about your offspring's parentage. Remember, a niche in brine saves trying. Nothing like choosing your location well in the first place. Study the currents around your prospective site—particularly their direction and force at such crucial times as flood-tide. Try to make sure you and your future mate won't be too close down-current from anybody else's site, since in a case like that accidents can happen. You understand, Junior?"

"Uh-huh," acknowledged Junior. "That's what the fellows mean when they say don't let anybody get the drop on you."

"Well," said Pater flatly.

"But it all seems sort of silly," said Junior stubbornly. "I'd rather just keep moving around and not have to do all that figuring. And the ocean's full of things I haven't seen yet. I don't *want* to grow down!"

Mater paled with shock. Pater gave his spawn a scolding, scandalized look. "You'll learn! You can't beat Biology," he said thickly, creditably keeping his voice down. "Junior, you may go!"

Junior bobbled off, and Pater admonished Mater sternly: "We must have patience, my dear! All children pass through these larval stages . . ."

"Yes, dear," sighed Mater.

At long last, Junior seemed to have resigned himself to making the best of it.

With considerable exertions, hampered by his increasing bottom-heaviness, he was fetching loads of stones, seaweed and other debris to a spot downslope, and there laboring over what promised to be a fairly ambitious cairn. Judging by what they could see of it, his homesite might even prove a credit to the colony (thus Mater mused) and attract a mate who would be a good catch (so went Pater's thoughts).

Junior was still to be seen at times along the reef in company with his free-swimming friends among the other polyps, at some of whom his parents had always looked askance, fearing they were by no means well-bred. In fact, there was strong suspicion that some of them—waifs from the disreputable shallows district in the hazardous reaches just below the tide-mark—had never been bred at all, but were products of budding, a practice frowned on in polite society.

However, Junior's appearance and rate of locomotion made it clear he would soon be done with juvenile follies. As Pater repeated with satisfaction, you can't beat Biology; as one becomes more and more bottle-shaped the romantic illusions of youth must inevitably perish.

"I always knew there was sound stuff in the youngster," declared Pater expansively.

"At least he won't be able to go around with those ragamuffins much longer," breathed Mater thankfully.

"What does the young fool think he's doing, fiddling round with soapstone?" grumbled Pater, peering critically through the green to try to make out the details of Junior's building. "Doesn't he know it's apt to slip its place in a year or two?"

"Look, dear," hissed Mater acidly, "isn't that the little

polyp who was so rude once? . . . I wish she wouldn't keep watching Junior like that. Our northwest neighbor heard *positively* that she's the child of an only parent!"

"Never mind," Pater turned to reassure her. "Once Junior is properly rooted, his self-respect will cause him to keep riffraff at a distance. It's a matter of psychology, my dear; the vertical position makes all the difference in one's thinking."

The great day arrived.

Laboriously Junior put a few finishing touches to his construction—which, so far as could be seen from a distance, had turned out decent-looking enough, though it was rather questionably original in design, lower and flatter than was customary.

With one more look at his handiwork, Junior turned bottom-end-down and sank wearily onto the finished site. After a minute, he paddled experimentally, but flailing tentacles failed to lift him—he was already rooted, and growing more solidly so by the moment.

The younger polyps peered from the hollows of the reef in roundeyed awe touched with fear.

"Congratulations!" cried the neighbors. Pater and Mater bowed this way and that in acknowledgment. Mater waved a condescending tentacle to the three maiden aunts.

"I told you so!" said Pater triumphantly.

"Yes, dear," said Mater meekly.

Suddenly there were outcries of alarm from the dwellers down-reef. A wave of dismay swept audibly through all the nearer part of the colony. Pater and Mater looked round and froze.

Junior had begun paddling again, but this time in a most peculiar manner—with a rotary twist and a sidewise scoop which looked awkward, but which he performed so deftly that he must have practiced it. Fixed upright as he was now on the platform he had built, he looked for all the world as if he were trying to swim sidewise.

"He's gone mad!" squeaked Mater, grasping at the obvious straw.

"I—" gulped Pater, "I'm afraid not."

At least, they saw, there was method in Junior's actions. He went on paddling in the same fashion—and now he, and his platform with him, were farther away than they had been, and growing more remote all the time.

Parts of the homesite that was not a homesite revolved in some way incomprehensible to eyes that had never seen the like. And the whole affair trundled along, rocking at bumps in the sandy bottom, and squeaking painfully; nevertheless, it moved.

The polyps watching from the reef swam out and frolicked after Junior, watching his contrivance go and chattering questions, while their parents bawled at them to keep away from that.

The three maiden aunts shrieked faintly and swooned in one another's tentacles. The colony was shaken as it had not been since the tidal wave.

"COME BACK!" thundered Pater. "You CAN'T do that!"

"*Come back!*" shrilled Mater. "You can't do *that!*"

"Come back!" gabbled the neighbors. "You can't do that!"

But Junior was past listening to reason. Junior was on wheels.

THE CAVE OF NIGHT

by

James E. Gunn

... and so we leave behind us the troubled waters of Junior's native coastal shelf, and with a gentle swish and a graceful swoop we warp through space and time, to find ourselves again on Mother Earth, the last words of our distant friends still ringing in our ears . . .

YOU CAN'T DO THAT!

A new invention is a terrifying thing—on terra firma, underseas, or up above the stratosphere. James Gunn, who has distinguished himself by turning out more good solid "new-idea" stories during the past year than just about any other writer in s-f, here suggests a way to peddle your new product to the old folks at home and make 'em like it.

THE PHRASE was first used by a poet disguised in the cynical hide of a newspaper reporter. It appeared on the first day and was widely reprinted. He wrote:

"At eight o'clock, after the Sun has set and the sky is darkening, look up! There's a man up there where no man has ever been.

"He is lost in the cave of night .

The headlines demanded something short, vigorous and descriptive. That was it. It was inaccurate, but it stuck.

If anybody was in a cave, it was the rest of humanity. Painfully, triumphantly, one man had climbed out. Now he couldn't find his way back into the cave with the rest of us.

What goes up doesn't always come back down.

That was the first day. After it came twenty-nine days

of agonized suspense.

The cave of night. I wish the phrase had been mine.

That was it, the tag, the symbol. It was the first thing a man saw when he glanced at the newspaper. It was the way people talked about it: "What's the latest about the cave?" It summed it all up, the drama, the anxiety, the hope.

Maybe it was the Floyd Collins influence. The papers dug up their files on that old tragedy, reminiscing, comparing; and they remembered the little girl—Kathy Fiscus, wasn't it?—who was trapped in that abandoned, California drain pipe; and a number of others.

Periodically, it happens, a sequence of events so accidentally dramatic that men lose their hatreds, their terrors, their shynesses, their inadequacies, and the human race momentarily recognizes its kinship.

The essential ingredients are these: A person must be in unusual and desperate peril. The peril must have duration. There must be proof that the person is still alive. Rescue attempts must be made. Publicity must be widespread.

One could probably be constructed artificially, but if the world ever discovered the fraud, it would never forgive.

Like many others, I have tried to analyze what makes a niggling, squabbling, callous race of beings suddenly share that most human emotion of sympathy, and, like them, I have not succeeded. Suddenly a distant stranger will mean more than their own comfort. Every waking moment, they pray: Live, Floyd! Live, Kathy! Live, Rev!

We pass on the street, we who would not have nodded, and ask, "Will they get there in time?"

Optimists and pessimists alike, we hope so. We all hope so.

In a sense, this one was different. This was purposeful. Knowing the risk, accepting it because there was no other way to do what had to be done, Rev had gone into the cave of night. The accident was that he could not return.

The news came out of nowhere—literally—to an unsus-

pecting world. The earliest mention the historians' have been able to locate was an item about a ham radio operator in Davenport, Iowa. He picked up a distress signal on a sticky-hot June evening.

The message, he said later, seemed to fade in, reach a peak, and fade out:

"... and fuel tanks empty. —ceiver broke ... transmitting in clear so someone can pick this up, and ... no way to get back stuck . . ."

A small enough beginning.

The next message was received by a military base radio watch near Fairbanks, Alaska. That was early in the morning. Half an hour later, a night-shift worker in Boston heard something on his short-wave set that sent him rushing to the telephone.

That morning, the whole world learned the story. It broke over them, a wave of excitement and concern. Orbiting 1,075 miles above their heads was a man, an officer of the United States Air Force, in a fuelless spaceship.

All by itself, the spaceship part would have captured the world's attention. It was achievement as monumental as anything Man has ever done and far more spectacular. It was liberation from the tyranny of Earth, this jealous mother who had bound her children tight with the apron strings of gravity.

Man was free. It was a symbol that nothing is completely and finally impossible if Man wants it hard enough and long enough.

There are regions that humanity finds peculiarly congenial. Like all Earth's creatures, Man is a product and a victim of environment. His triumph is that the slave became the master. Unlike more specialized animals, he distributed himself across the entire surface of the Earth, from the frozen Antarctic continent to the Arctic icecap.

Man became an equatorial animal, a temperate zone animal, an arctic animal. He became a plain dweller, a valley dweller, a mountain dweller. The swamp and the desert became equally his home.

Man made his own environment.

With his inventive mind and his dexterous hands, he fashioned it, conquered cold and heat, dampness, aridness, land, sea, air. Now, with his science, he had conquered everything. He had become independent of the world that bore him.

It was a birthday cake for all mankind, celebrating its coming of age.

Brutally, the disaster was icing on the cake.

But it was more, too. When everything is considered, perhaps it was the aspect that, for a few, brief days, united humanity and made possible what we did.

It was a sign: Man is never completely independent of Earth; he carries with him his environment; he is always and forever a part of humanity. It was a conquest mellowed by a confession of mortality and error.

It was a statement: Man has within him the qualities of greatness that will never accept the restraints of circumstance, and yet he carries, too, the seeds of fallibility that we all recognize in ourselves.

Rev was one of us. His triumph was our triumph; his peril—more fully and finely—was our peril.

Reverdy L. McMillen, III, first lieutenant, U.S.A.F. Pilot. Rocket jockey. Man. Rev. He was only a thousand miles away, calling for help, but those miles were straight up. We got to know him as well as any member of our own family.

The news came as a great personal shock to me. I knew Rev. We had become good friends in college, and fortune had thrown us together in the Air Force, a writer and a pilot. I had got out as soon as possible, but Rev had stayed in. I knew, vaguely, that he had been testing rocket-powered airplanes with Chuck Yeager. But I had no idea that the rocket program was that close to space.

Nobody did. It was a better-kept secret than the Manhattan Project.

I remember staring at Rev's picture in the evening newspaper—the straight black hair, the thin, rakish mustache,

the Clark Gable ears, the reckless, rueful grin—and I felt again, like a physical thing, his great joy in living. It expressed itself in a hundred ways. He loved widely, but with discrimination. He ate well, drank heartily, reveled in expert jazz and artistic inventiveness, and talked incessantly.

Now he was alone and soon all that might be extinguished. I told myself that I would help.

That was a time of wild enthusiasm. Men mobbed the Air Force Proving Grounds at Cocoa, Florida, wildly volunteering their services. But I was no engineer. I wasn't even a welder or a riveter. At best, I was only a poor word mechanic.

But words, at least, I could contribute.

I made a hasty verbal agreement with a local paper and caught the first plane to Washington, D. C. For a long time, I liked to think that what I wrote during the next few days had something to do with subsequent events, for many of my articles were picked up for reprint by other newspapers.

The Washington fiasco was the responsibility of the Senate Investigating Committee. It subpoenaed everybody in sight—which effectively removed them from the vital work they were doing. But within a day, the Committee realized that it had bitten off a bite it could neither swallow nor spit out.

General Beauregard Finch, head of the research and development program, was the tough morsel the Committee gagged on. Coldly, accurately, he described the development of the project, the scientific and technical research, the tests, the building of the ship, the training of the prospective crewmen, and the winnowing of the volunteers down to one man.

In words more eloquent because of their clipped precision, he described the takeoff of the giant three-stage ship, shoved upward on a lengthening arm of combining hydrazine and nitric acid. Within fifty-six minutes, the remaining third stage had reached its orbital height of 1,075 miles.

It had coasted there. In order to maintain that orbit, the motors had to flicker on for fifteen seconds.

At that moment, disaster laughed at Man's careful calculations.

Before Rev could override the automatics, the motors had flamed for almost half a minute. The fuel he had depended upon to slow the ship so that it would drop, re-enter the atmosphere and be reclaimed by Earth was almost gone. His efforts to counteract the excess speed resulted only in an approximation of the original orbit.

The fact was this: Rev was up there. He would stay there until someone came and got him.

And there was no way to get there.

The Committee took that as an admission of guilt and incompetence; they tried to lever themselves free with it, but General Finch was not to be intimidated. A manned ship had been sent up because no mechanical or electronic computer could contain the vast possibilities for decision and action built into a human being.

The original computer was still the best all-purpose computer.

There had been only one ship built, true. But there was good reason for that, a completely practical reason—money.

Leaders are, by definition, ahead of the people. But this wasn't a field in which they could show the way and wait for the people to follow. This was no expedition in ancient ships, no light exploring party, no pilot-plant operation. Like a parachute jump, it had to be successful the first time.

This was an enterprise into new, expensive fields. It demanded money (billions of dollars), brains (the best available), and the hard, dedicated labor of men (thousands of them).

General Finch became a national hero that afternoon. He said, in bold words, "With the limited funds you gave us, we have done what we set out to do. We have demonstrated that space flight is possible, that a space platform

is feasible.

"If there is any inefficiency, if there is any blame for what has happened, it lies at the door of those who lacked confidence in the courage and ability of their countrymen to fight free of Earth to the greatest glory. Senator, how did you vote on that?"

But I am not writing a history. The shelves are full of them. I will touch on the international repercussions only enough to show that the event was no more a respecter of national boundaries than was Rev's orbiting ship.



The orbit was almost perpendicular to the equator. The ship traveled as far north as Nome, as far south as Little America on the Antarctic Continent. It completed one giant circle every two hours. Meanwhile, the Earth rotated beneath. If the ship had been equipped with adequate optical instruments, Rev could have observed every spot on Earth within twenty-four hours. He could have seen fleets and their dispositions, aircraft carriers and the planes taking off their decks, troop maneuvers.

In the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Russian ambassador protested this unwarranted and illegal violation of its national boundaries. He hinted darkly that it would not be allowed to continue. The U.S.S.R. had not been caught unprepared, he said. If the violation went on—"every few hours!"—drastic steps would be taken.

World opinion reared up in indignation. The U.S.S.R. immediately retreated and pretended, as only it could, that its belligerence had been an unwarranted inference and that it had never said anything of the sort, anyway.

This was not a military observer above our heads. It was a man who would soon be dead unless help reached him.

A world offered what it had. Even the U.S.S.R. announced that it was outfitting a rescue ship, since its space program was already on the verge of success. And the American public responded with more than a billion dollars within a week. Congress appropriated another billion. Thousands of men and women volunteered.

The race began.

Would the rescue party reach the ship in time? The world prayed.

And it listened daily to the voice of a man it hoped to buy back from death.

The problem shaped up like this:

The trip had been planned to last for only a few days. By careful rationing, the food and water might be stretched out for more than a month, but the oxygen, by cutting down activity to conserve it, couldn't possibly last more than thirty days. That was the absolute outside limit.

I remember reading the carefully detailed calculations in the paper and studying them for some hopeful error. There was none.

Within a few hours, the discarded first stage of the ship had been located floating in the Atlantic Ocean. It was towed back to Cocoa, Florida. Almost a week was needed to find and return to the Proving Grounds the second stage, which had landed 906 miles away.

Both sections were practically undamaged; their fall had been cushioned by ribbon parachute. They could be cleaned, repaired and used again. The trouble was the vital third stage—the nose section. A new one had to be designed and built within a month.

Space-madness became a new form of hysteria. We read statistics, we memorized insignificant details, we studied diagrams, we learned the risks and the dangers and how they would be met and conquered. It all became part of us. We watched the slow progress of the second ship and silently, tautly, urged it upward.

The schedule overhead became part of everyone's daily life. Work stopped while people rushed to windows or outside or to their television sets, hoping for a glimpse, a glint from the high, swift ship, so near, so untouchably far.

And we listened to the voice from the cave of night:

"I've been staring out the portholes. I never tire of that.

Through the one on the right, I see what looks like a black velvet curtain with a strong light behind it. There are pinpoint holes in the curtain and the light shines through, not winking the way stars do, but steady. There's no air up here. That's the reason. The mind can understand and still misinterpret.

"My air is holding out better than I expected. By my figures, it should last twenty-seven days more. I shouldn't use so much of it talking all the time, but it's hard to stop. Talking, I feel as if I'm still in touch with Earth, still one of you, even if I am way up here.

"Through the left-hand window is San Francisco Bay, looking like a dark, wandering arm extended by the ocean octopus. The city itself looks like a heap of diamonds with trails scattered from it. It glitters up cheerfully, an old friend. It misses me, it says. Hurry home, it says. It's gone now, out of sight. Good-bye, Frisco!

"Do you hear me down there? Sometimes I wonder. You can't see me now. I'm in the Earth's shadow. You'll have to wait hours for the dawn. I'll have mine in a few minutes.

"You're all busy down there. I know that. If I know you, you're all worrying about me, working to get me down, forgetting everything else. You don't know what a feeling that is. I hope to Heaven you never have to, wonderful though it is.

"Too bad the receiver was broken, but if it had to be one or the other, I'm glad it was the transmitter that came through. There's only one of me. There are billions of you to talk to.

"I wish there were some way I could be sure you were hearing me. Just that one thing might keep me from going crazy."

Rev, you were one in millions. We read all about your selection, your training. You were our representative, picked with our greatest skill.

Out of a thousand who passed the initial rigid requirements for education, physical and emotional condition and age, only five could qualify for space. They couldn't be too

tall, too stout, too young, too old. Medical and psychiatric tests weeded them out.

One of the training machines—Lord, how we studied this—reproduces the acceleration strains of a blasting rocket. Another trains men for maneuvering in the weightlessness of space. A third duplicates the cramped, sealed conditions of a spaceship cabin. Out of the final five, you were the only one who qualified.

No, Rev, if any of us could stay sane, it was you.

There were thousands of suggestions, almost all of them useless. Psychologists suggested self-hypnotism; cultists suggested yoga. One man sent in a detailed sketch of a giant electromagnet with which Rev's ship could be drawn back to Earth.

General Finch had the only practical idea. He outlined a plan for letting Rev know that we were listening. He picked out Kansas City and set the time. "Midnight," he said. "On the dot. Not a minute earlier or later. At that moment, he'll be right overhead."

And at midnight, every light in the city went out and came back on and went out and came back on again.

For a few awful moments, we wondered if the man up there in the cave of night had seen. Then came the voice we knew now so well that it seemed it had always been with us, a part of us, our dreams and our waking.

The voice was husky with emotion:

"Thanks . . . Thanks for listening. Thanks, Kansas City. I saw you winking at me. I'm not alone. I know that now. I'll never forget. Thanks."

And silence then as the ship fell below the horizon. We pictured it to ourselves sometimes, continually circling the Earth, its trajectory exactly matching the curvature of the globe beneath it. We wondered if it would ever stop.

Like the Moon, would it be a satellite of the Earth forever?

We went through our daily chores like automatons while we watched the third stage of the rocket take shape. We raced against a dwindling air supply, and death raced to catch a ship moving at 15,800 miles per hour.

We watched the ship grow. On our television screens, we saw the construction of the cellular fuel tanks, the rocket motors, and the fantastic multitude of pumps, valves, gauges, switches, circuits, transistors, and tubes.

The personnel space was built to carry five men instead of one man. We watched it develop, a Spartan simplicity in the middle of the great complex, and it was as if we ourselves would live there, would watch those dials and instruments, would grip those chair-arm controls for the infinitesimal sign that the automatic pilot had faltered, would feel the soft flesh and the softer internal organs being wrenched away from the unyielding bone, and would hurtle upward into the cave of night.

We watched the plating wrap itself protectively around the vitals of the nose section. The wings were attached; they would make the ship a huge, metal glider in its unpowered descent to Earth after the job was done.

We met the men who would man the ship. We grew to know them as we watched them train, saw them fighting artificial gravities, testing spacesuits in simulated vacuums, practicing maneuvers in the weightless condition of free fall.

That was what we lived for.

And we listened to the voice that came to us out of the night:

"Twenty-one days. Three weeks. Seems like more. Feel a little sluggish, but there's no room for exercise in a coffin. The concentrated foods I've been eating are fine, but not for a steady diet. Oh, what I'd give for a piece of home-baked apple pie!

"The weightlessness got me at first. Felt I was sitting on a ball that was spinning in all directions at once. Lost my breakfast a couple of times before I learned to stare at one thing. As long as you don't let your eyes roam, you're okay.

"There's Lake Michigan! My God, but it's blue today! Dazzles the eyes! There's Milwaukee, and how are the Braves doing? It must be a hot day in Chicago. It's a little muggy up here, too. The water absorbers must be over-

loaded.

"The air smells funny, but I'm not surprised. I must smell funny, too, after twenty-one days without a bath. Wish I could have one. There are an awful lot of things I used to take for granted and suddenly want more than—

"Forget that, will you? Don't worry about me. I'm fine. I know you're working to get me down. If you don't succeed, that's okay with me. My life wouldn't just be wasted. I've done what I've always wanted to do. I'd do it again.

"Too bad, though, that we only had the money for one ship."

And again: "An hour ago, I saw the Sun rise over Russia. It looks like any other land from here, green where it should be green, farther north a sort of mud color, and then white where the snow is still deep.

"Up here, you wonder why we're so different when the land is the same. You think: we're all children of the same mother planet. Who says we're different?

"Think I'm crazy? Maybe you're right. It doesn't matter much what I say as long as I say something. This is one time I won't be interrupted. Did any man ever have such an audience?"

No, Rev. Never.

The voice from above, historical now, preserved:

"I guess the gadgets are all right. You slide-rule mechanics! You test-tube artists! You finding what you want? Getting the dope on cosmic rays, meteoric dust, those islands you could never map, the cloud formations, wind movements, all the weather data? Hope the telemetering gauges are working. They're more important than my voice."

I don't think so, Rev. But we got the data. We built some of it into the new ships. *Ships*, not *ship*, for we didn't stop with one. Before we were finished, we had two complete three-stages and a dozen nose sections.

The voice: "Air's bad tonight. Can't seem to get a full breath. Sticks in the lungs. Doesn't matter, though. I wish you could all see what I have seen, the vast-spreading uni-

verse around Earth, like a bride in a soft veil. You'd know, then, that we belong out here."

We know, Rev. You led us out. You showed us the way.

We listened and we watched. It seems to me now that we held our breath for thirty days.

At last we watched the fuel pumping into the ship—nitric acid and hydrazine. A month ago, we did not know their names; now we recognize them as the very substances of life itself. It flowed through the long special hoses, dangerous, cautiously grounded, over half a million dollars' worth of rocket fuel.

Statisticians estimate that more than a hundred million Americans were watching their television sets that day. Watching and praying.

Suddenly the view switched to the ship fleeing south above us. The technicians were expert now. The telescopes picked it up instantly, the focus perfect the first time, and tracked it across the sky until it dropped beyond the horizon. It looked no different now than when we had seen it first.

But the voice that came from our speakers was different. It was weak. It coughed frequently and paused for breath.

"Air very bad. Better hurry. Can't last much longer
Silly! . . . Of course you'll hurry.

"Don't want anyone feeling sorry for me. . . . I've been living fast . . . Thirty days? I've seen 360 sunrises, 360 sunsets . . . I've seen what no man has ever seen before . . . I was the first. That's something . . . worth dying for . . .

"I've seen the stars, clear and undiminished. They look cold, but there's warmth to them and life. They have families of planets like our own sun, some of them . . . They must. God wouldn't put them there for no purpose . . . They can be homes to our future generations. Or, if they have inhabitants, we can trade with them: goods, ideas, the love of creation . . .

"But—more than this—I have seen the Earth. I have seen it—as no man has ever seen it—turning below me like

a fantastic ball, the seas like blue glass in the Sun . . . or lashed into gray storm-peaks . . . and the land green with life . . . the cities of the world in the night, sparkling . . . and the people . . .

"I have seen the Earth—there where I have lived and loved . . . I have known it better than any man and loved it better and known its children better . . . It has been good . . .

"Good-by . . . I have a better tomb than the greatest conqueror Earth ever bore . . . Do not disturb . . ."

We wept. How could we help it?

Rescue was so close and we could not hurry it. We watched impotently. The crew were hoisted far up into the nose section of the three-stage rocket. It stood as tall as a 24-story building. *Hurry!* we urged. But they could not hurry. The interception of a swiftly moving target is precision business. The takeoff was all calculated and impressed on the metal and glass and free electrons of an electronic computer.

The ship was tightened down methodically. The spectators scurried back from the base of the ship. We waited. The ship waited. Tall and slim as it was, it seemed to crouch. Someone counted off the seconds to a breathless world: ten—nine—eight . . . five, four, three . . . one—*fire!*

There was no flame, and then we saw it spurting into the air from the exhaust tunnel several hundred feet away. The ship balanced, unmoving, on a squat column of incandescence; the column stretched itself, grew tall; the huge ship picked up speed and dwindled into a point of brightness.

The telescopic lenses found it, lost it, found it again. It arched over on its side and thrust itself seaward. At the end of 84 seconds, the rear jets faltered, and our hearts faltered with them. Then we saw that the first stage had been dropped. The rest of the ship moved off on a new fiery trail. A ring-shaped ribbon parachute blossomed out of the third stage and slowed it rapidly.

The second stage dropped away 124 seconds later. The nose section, with its human cargo, its rescue equipment,

went on alone. At 63 miles altitude, the flaring exhaust cut out. The third stage would coast up the gravitational hill more than a thousand miles.

Our stomachs were knotted with dread as the rescue ship disappeared beyond the horizon of the farthest television camera. By this time, it was on the other side of the world, speeding toward a carefully planned rendezvous with its sister.

Hang on, Rev! Don't give up!

Fifty-six minutes. That was how long we had to wait. Fifty-six minutes from the takeoff until the ship was in its orbit. After that, the party would need time to match speeds, to send a space-suited crewman drifting across the emptiness between, over the vast, eerily turning sphere of the Earth beneath.

In imagination, we followed them.

Minutes would be lost while the rescuer clung to the ship, opened the airlock cautiously so that none of the precious remnants of air would be lost, and passed into the ship where one man had known utter loneliness.

We waited. We hoped.

Fifty-six minutes. They passed. An hour. Thirty minutes more. We reminded ourselves—and were reminded—that the first concern was Rev. It might be hours before we would get any real news.

The tension mounted unbearably. We waited—a nation, a world—for relief.

At eighteen minutes less than two hours—*too soon*, we told ourselves, lest we hope too much—we heard the voice of Captain Frank Pickrell, who was later to become the first commander of the *Doughnut*.

"I have just entered the ship," he said slowly. "The airlock was open." He paused. The implications stunned our emotions; we listened mutely. "Lieutenant McMillen is dead. He died heroically, waiting until all hope was gone, until every oxygen gauge stood at zero. And then—well, the airlock was open when we arrived.

"In accordance with his own wishes, his body will be left here in its eternal-orbit. This ship will be his tomb for all men to see when they look up toward the stars. As long as there are men on Earth, it will circle above them, an everlasting reminder of what men have done and what men can do.

"That was Lieutenant McMillen's hope. This he did not only as an American, but as a man, dying for all humanity, and all humanity can glory for it.

"From this moment, let this be his shrine, sacred to all the generations of spacemen, inviolate. And let it be a symbol that Man's dreams can be realized, but sometimes the price is steep.

"I am going to leave now. My feet will be the last to touch this deck. The oxygen I released is almost used up. Lieutenant McMillen is in his control chair, staring out toward the stars. I will leave the airlock doors open behind me. Let the airless, frigid arms of space protect and preserve for all eternity the man they would not let go."

Good-by, Rev! Farewell! Good night!

Rev was not long alone. He was the first, but not the last to receive a space burial and a hero's farewell.

This, as I said, is no history of the conquest of space. Every child knows the story as well as I and can identify the make of a spaceship more swiftly.

The story of the combined efforts that built the orbital platform irreverently called the *Doughnut* has been told by others. We have learned at length the political triumph that placed it under United Nations control.

Its contribution to our daily lives has received the accolade of the commonplace. It is an observatory, a laboratory, and a guardian. Startling discoveries have come out of that weightless, airless, heatless place. It has learned how weather is made and predicted it with incredible accuracy. It has observed the stars clear of the veil of the atmosphere. And it has insured our peace . . .

It has paid its way. No one can question that. It and its

smaller relay stations made possible today's worldwide television and radio network. There is no place on Earth where a free voice cannot be heard or the face of freedom be seen. Sometimes we find ourselves wondering how it could have been any other way.

And we have had adventure. We have traveled to the dead gypsum seas of the Moon with the first exploration party. This year, we will solve the mysteries of Mars. From our armchairs, we will thrill to the discoveries of our pioneers—our stand-ins, so to speak. It has given us a common heritage, a common goal, and for the first time we are united.

This I mention only for background; no one will argue that the conquest of space was not of incalculable benefit to all mankind.

The whole thing came back to me recently, an overpowering flood of memory. I was skirting Times Square, where every face is a stranger's, and suddenly I stopped, incredulous.

"Rev!" I shouted.

The man kept on walking. He passed me without a glance. I turned around and stared after him. I started to run. I grabbed him by the arm. "Rev!" I said huskily, swinging him around. "Is it really you?"

The man smiled politely. "You must have mistaken me for someone else." He unclamped my fingers easily and moved away. I realized then that there were two men with him, one on each side. I felt their eyes on my face, memorizing it.

Probably it didn't mean anything. We all have our doubles. I could have been mistaken.

But it started me remembering and thinking.

The first thing the rocket experts had to consider was expense. They didn't have the money. The second thing was weight. Even a medium-sized man is heavy when rocket payloads are reckoned, and the stores and equipment essential to his survival are many times heavier.

If Rev had escaped alive, why had they announced that he was dead? But I knew the question was all wrong.

If my speculations were right, Rev had never been up there at all. The essential payload was only a thirty-day recording and a transmitter. Even if the major feat of sending up a manned rocket was beyond their means and their techniques, they could send up that much.

Then they got the money; they got the volunteers and the techniques.

I suppose the telemetered reports from the rocket helped. But what they accomplished in thirty days was an unparalleled miracle.

The timing of the recording must have taken months of work; but the vital part of the scheme was secrecy. General Finch had to know and Captain—now Colonel—Pickrell. A few others—workmen, administrators—and Rev . . .

What could they do with him? Disguise him? Yes. And then hide him in the biggest city in the world. They would have done it that way.

It gave me a funny, sick kind of feeling, thinking about it. Like everybody else, I don't like to be taken in by a phony plea. And this was a fraud perpetrated on all humanity.

Yet it had led us to the planets. Perhaps it would lead us beyond, even to the stars. I asked myself: could they have done it any other way?

I would like to think I was mistaken. This myth has become part of us. We lived through it ourselves, helped make it. Someday, I tell myself, a spaceman whose reverence is greater than his obedience will make a pilgrimage to that swift shrine and find only an empty shell.

I shudder then.

This pulled us together. In a sense, it keeps us together. Nothing is more important than that.

I try to convince myself that I was mistaken. The straight black hair was gray at the temples now and cut much shorter. The mustache was gone. The Clark Gable ears were flat to the head; that's a simple operation, I understand.

But grins are hard to change. And anyone who lived through those thirty days will never forget that voice.

I think about Rev and the life he must have now, the things he loved and can never enjoy again, and I realize perhaps he made the greater sacrifice.

I think sometimes he must wish he were really in the cave of night, seated in that icy control chair 1,075 miles above, staring out at the stars.

THE HOOFER

by

Walter M. Miller, Jr.

There is nothing I can say about Walt Miller's work that I haven't already said (enthusiastically) in several previous anthologies; nothing except that there has been far too little of it published recently—and that, like Abernathy, he has become an (anthology) editor's nightmare. Of the four stories that appeared this year, one ("The Darfstellar") took the Novelette Award at the annual S-F Convention, and two more have already appeared in other anthologies.

Here is the other one, the story of a man who did go out into the Cave of Night, and then came back—back to the real cave, the Cave of Earth.

THEY ALL KNEW he was a spacer because of the white goggle marks on his sun-scorched face, and so they tolerated him and helped him. They even made allowances for him when he staggered and fell in the aisle of the bus while pursuing the harassed little housewife from seat to seat and cajoling her to sit and talk with him.

Having fallen, he decided to sleep in the aisle. Two men helped him to the back of the bus, dumped him on the rear seat, and tucked his gin bottle safely out of sight. After all, he had not seen Earth for nine months, and judging by the crusted matter about his eyelids, he couldn't have seen it too well now, even if he had been sober. Glare-blindness, gravity-legs, and agoraphobia were excuses for a lot of things, when a man was just back from Big Bottomless. And who could blame a man for acting strangely?

Minutes later, he was back up the aisle and swaying

giddily over the little housewife. "How!" he said. "Me Chief Broken Wing. You wanta Indian wrestle?"

The girl, who sat nervously staring at him, smiled wanly, and shook her head.

"Quiet li'l pigeon, aren'tcha?" he burbled affectionately, crashing into the seat beside her.

The two men slid out of their seats, and a hand clamped his shoulder. "Come on, Broken Wing, let's go back to bed."

"My name's Hogey," he said. "Big Hogey Parker. I was just kidding about being a Indian."

"Yeah. Come on, let's go have a drink." They got him on his feet, and led him stumbling back down the aisle.

"My ma was half Cherokee, see? That's how come I said it. You wanta hear a war whoop? Real stuff."

"Never mind."

He cupped his hands to his mouth and favored them with a blood-curdling proof of his ancestry, while the female passengers stirred restlessly and hunched in their seats. The driver stopped the bus and went back to warn him against any further display. The driver flashed a deputy's badge and threatened to turn him over to a constable.

"I gotta get home," Big Hogey told him. "I got me a son now, that's why. You know? A little baby pigeon of a son. Haven't seen him yet."

"Will you just sit still and be quiet then, eh?"

Big Hogey nodded emphatically. "Shorry, officer, I didn't mean to make any trouble."

When the bus started again, he fell on his side and lay still. He made retching sounds for a time, then rested, snoring softly. The bus driver woke him again at Caine's junction, retrieved his gin bottle from behind the seat, and helped him down the aisle and out of the bus.

Big Hogey stumbled about for a moment, then sat down hard in the gravel at the shoulder of the road. The driver paused with one foot on the step, looking around. There was not even a store at the road junction, but only a freight building next to the railroad track, a couple of

farmhouses at the edge of a side-road, and, just across the way, a deserted filling station with a sagging roof. The land was Great Plains country, treeless, barren, and rolling.

Big Hoge got up and staggered around in front of the bus, clutching at it for support, losing his duffle bag.

"Hey, watch the traffic!" The driver warned. With a surge of unwelcome compassion he trotted around after his troublesome passenger, taking his arm as he sagged again. "You crossing?"

"Yah," Hoge muttered. "Lemme alone, I'm okay."

The driver started across the highway with him. The traffic was sparse, but fast and dangerous in the central ninety-mile lane.

"I'm okay," Hoge kept protesting. "I'm a tumbler, ya know? Gravity's got me. Damn gravity. I'm not used to gravity, ya know? I used to be a tumbler—*huk!*—only now I gotta be a hoofer. 'Count of li'l Hoge. You know about li'l Hoge?"

"Yeah. Your son. Come on."

"Say, you gotta son? I bet you gotta son."

"Two kids," said the driver, catching Hoge's bag as it slipped from his shoulder. "Both girls."

"Say, you oughta be home with them kids. Man oughta stick with his family. You oughta get another job." Hoge eyed him owlishly, waggled a moralistic finger, skidded on the gravel as they stepped onto the opposite shoulder, and sprawled again.

The driver blew a weary breath, looked down at him, and shook his head. Maybe it'd be kinder to find a constable after all. This guy could get himself killed, wandering around loose.

"Somebody supposed to meet you?" he asked, squinting around at the dusty hills.

"*Huk!*—who, me?" Hoge giggled, belched, and shook his head. "Nope. Nobody knows I'm coming. S'prise. I'm supposed to be here a week ago." He looked up at the driver with a pained expression. "Week late, ya know? Marie's gonna be sore—woo-hoo!—is she gonna be sore!"

He wagged his head severely at the ground.

"Which way are you going?" the driver grunted impatiently.

Hogey pointed down the side-road that led back into the hills. "Marie's pop's place. You know where? 'Bout three miles from here. Gotta walk, I guess."

"Don't," the driver warned. "You sit there by the culvert till you get a ride. Okay?"

Hogey nodded forlornly.

"Now stay out of the road," the driver warned, then hurried back across the highway. Moments later, the atomic battery-driven motors droned mournfully, and the bus pulled away.

Big Hogey blinked after it, rubbing the back of his neck. "Nice people," he said. "Nice buncha people. All hoofers."

With a grunt and a lurch, he got to his feet, but his legs wouldn't work right. With his tumbler's reflexes, he fought to right himself with frantic arm motions, but gravity claimed him, and he went stumbling into the ditch.

"Damn legs, damn crazy legs!" he cried.

The bottom of the ditch was wet, and he crawled up the embankment with mud-soaked knees, and sat on the shoulder again. The gin bottle was still intact. He had himself a long fiery drink, and it warmed him deep down. He blinked around at the gaunt and treeless land.

The sun was almost down, forge-red on a dusty horizon. The blood-streaked sky faded into sulphurous yellow toward the zenith, and the very air that hung over the land seemed full of yellow smoke, the omnipresent dust of the plains.

A farm truck turned onto the side-road and moaned away, its driver hardly glancing at the dark young man who sat swaying on his dufflebag near the culvert. Hogey scarcely noticed the vehicle. He just kept staring at the crazy sun.

He shook his head. It wasn't really the sun. The sun, the real sun, was a hateful eye-sizzling horror in the dead black pit. It painted everything with pure white pain, and you saw things by the reflected painlight. The fat red sun

was strictly a phoney, and it didn't fool him any. He hated it for what he knew it was behind the gory mask, and for what it had done to his eyes.

With a grunt, he got to his feet, managed to shoulder the duffle bag, and started off down the middle of the farm road, lurching from side to side, and keeping his eyes on the rolling distances. Another car turned onto the side-road, honking angrily.

Hogey tried to turn around to look at it, but he forgot to shift his footing. He staggered and went down on the pavement. The car's tires screeched on the hot asphalt. Hogey lay there for a moment, groaning. That one had hurt his hip. A car door slammed and a big man with a florid face got out and stalked toward him, looking angry.

"What the hell's the matter with you, fella?" he drawled. "You soused? Man, you've really got a load."

Hogey got up doggedly, shaking his head to clear it. "Space legs," he prevaricated. "Got space legs. Can't stand the gravity."

The burly farmer retrieved his gin bottle for him, still miraculously unbroken. "Here's your gravity," he grunted. "Listen, fella, you better get home pronto."

"Pronto? Hey, I'm no Mex. Honest, I'm just space burned. You know?"

"Yeah. Say, who are you, anyway? Do you live around here?"

It was obvious that the big man had taken him for a hobo or a tramp. Hogey pulled himself together. "Goin' to the Hauptman's place. Marie. You know Marie?"

The farmer's eyebrows went up. "Marie Hauptman? Sure I know her. Only she's Marie Parker now. Has been, nigh on six years. Say—" He paused, then gaped. "You ain't her husband by any chance?"

"Hogey, that's me. Big Hogey Parker."

"Well, I'll be—! Get in the car. I'm going right past John Hauptman's place. Boy, you're in no shape to walk it."

He grinned wryly, waggled his head, and helped Hogey

and his bag into the back seat. A woman with a sun-wrinkled neck sat rigidly beside the farmer in the front, and she neither greeted the passenger nor looked around.

"They don't make cars like this anymore," the farmer called over the growl of the ancient gasoline engine and the grind of gears. "You can have them new atomics with their loads of hot isotopes under the seat. Ain't safe, I say—eh, Martha?"

The woman with the sun-baked neck quivered her head slightly. "A car like this was good enough for Pa, an' I reckon it's good enough for us," she drawled mournfully,

Five minutes later the car drew in to the side of the road. "Reckon you can walk it from here," the farmer said. "That's Hauptman's road just up ahead."

He helped Hogey out of the car and drove away without looking back to see if Hogey stayed on his feet. The woman with the sun-baked neck was suddenly talking garrulously in his direction.

It was twilight. The sun had set, and the yellow sky was turning gray. Hogey was too tired to go on, and his legs would no longer hold him. He blinked around at the land, got his eyes focused, and found what looked like Hauptman's place on a distant hillside. It was a big frame house surrounded by a wheatfield, and a few scrawny trees. Having located it, he stretched out in the tall grass beyond the ditch to take a little rest.

Somewhere dogs were barking, and a cricket sang creaking monotony in the grass. Once there was the distant thunder of a rocket blast from the launching station six miles to the west, but it faded quickly. An A-motored convertible whined past on the road, but Hogey went unseen.

When he awoke, it was night, and he was shivering. His stomach was screeching, and his nerves dancing with high voltages. He sat up and groped for his watch, then remembered he had pawned it after the poker game. Remembering the game and the results of the game made him wince and bite his lip and grope for the bottle again.

He sat breathing heavily for a moment after the stiff drink. Equating time to position had become second na-

ture with him, but he had to think for a moment because his defective vision prevented him from seeing the Earth-crescent.

Vega was almost straight above him in the late August sky, so he knew it wasn't much after sundown—probably about eight o'clock. He braced himself with another swallow of gin, picked himself up and got back to the road, feeling a little sobered after the nap.

He limped on up the pavement and turned left at the narrow drive that led between barbed-wire fences toward the Hauptman farmhouse, five hundred yards or so from the farm road. The fields on his left belonged to Marie's father, he knew. He was getting close—close to home and woman and child.

He dropped the bag suddenly and leaned against a fence post, rolling his head on his forearms and choking in spasms of air. He was shaking all over, and his belly writhed. He wanted to turn and run. He wanted to crawl out in the grass and hide.

What were they going to say? And Marie, Marie most of all. How was he going to tell her about the money?

Six hitches in space, and every time the promise had been the same: *One more tour, baby, and we'll have enough dough, and then I'll quit for good. One more time, and we'll have our stake—enough to open a little business, or buy a house with a mortgage and get a job.*

And she had waited, but the money had never been quite enough until this time. This time the tour had lasted nine months, and he had signed on for every run from station to moon-base to pick up the bonuses. And this time he'd made it. Two weeks ago, there had been forty-eight hundred in the bank. And now . . .

"Why?" he groaned, striking his forehead against his forearms. His arm slipped, and his head hit the top of the fencepost, and the pain blinded him for a moment. He staggered back into the road with a low roar, wiped blood from his forehead, and savagely kicked his bag.

It rolled a couple of yards up the road. He leaped after it and kicked it again. When he had finished with it, he

stood panting and angry, but feeling better. He shouldered the bag and hiked on toward the farmhouse.

They're hoofers, that's all—just an Earth-chained bunch of hoofers, even Marie. And I'm a tumbler. A born tumbler. Know what that means? It means—God, what does it mean? It means out in Big Bottomless, where Earth's like a fat moon with fuzzy mold growing on it. Mold, that's all you are, just mold.

A dog barked, and he wondered if he had been muttering aloud. He came to a fence-gap and paused in the darkness. The road wound around and came up the hill in front of the house. Maybe they were sitting on the porch. Maybe they'd already heard him coming. Maybe . . .

He was trembling again. He fished the fifth of gin out of his coat pocket and sloshed it. Still over half a pint. He decided to kill it. It wouldn't do to go home with a bottle sticking out of his pocket. He stood there in the night wind, sipping at it, and watching the reddish moon come up in the east. The moon looked as phoney as the setting sun.

He straightened in sudden determination. It had to be sometime. Get it over with, get it over with now. He opened the fence-gap, slipped through, and closed it firmly behind him. He retrieved his bag, and waded quietly through the tall grass until he reached the hedge which divided an area of sickly peach trees from the field. He got over the hedge somehow, and started through the trees toward the house. He stumbled over some old boards, and they clattered.

"Shhh!" he hissed, and moved on.

The dogs were barking angrily, and he heard a screen door slam. He stopped.

"Ho there!" a male voice called experimentally from the house.

One of Marie's brothers. Hogeey stood frozen in the shadow of a peach tree, waiting.

"Anybody out there?" the man called again.

Hogeey waited, then heard the man muttering, "Sic 'im, boy, sic 'im."

The hound's bark became eager. The animal came chasing down the slope, and stopped ten feet away to crouch and bark frantically at the shadow in the gloom. He knew the dog.

"Hookey!" he whispered. "Hookey boy—here!"

The dog stopped barking, sniffed, trotted closer, and went "Rrrooff!" Then he started sniffing suspiciously again.

"Easy, Hookey, here boy!" he whispered.

The dog came forward silently, sniffed his hand, and whined in recognition. Then he trotted around Hogey, panting doggy affection and dancing an invitation to romp. The man whistled from the porch. The dog froze, then trotted quickly back up the slope.

"Nothing, eh, Hookey?" the man on the porch said. "Chasin' armadillos again, eh?"

The screen door slammed again, and the porch light went out. Hogey stood there staring, unable to think. Somewhere beyond the window lights were—his woman, his son.

What the hell was a tumbler doing with a woman and a son?

After perhaps a minute, he stepped forward again. He tripped over a shovel, and his foot plunged into something that went *squelch* and swallowed the foot past the ankle. He fell forward into a heap of sand, and his foot went deeper into the sloppy wetness.

He lay there with his stinging forehead on his arms, cursing softly and crying. Finally he rolled over, pulled his foot out of the mess, and took off his shoes. They were full of mud—sticky sandy mud.

The dark world was reeling about him, and the wind was dragging at his breath. He fell back against the sand pile and let his feet sink in the mud hole and wriggled his toes. He was laughing soundlessly, and his face was wet in the wind. He couldn't think. He couldn't remember where he was and why, and he stopped caring, and after awhile he felt better.

The stars were swimming over him, dancing crazily, and

the mud cooled his feet, and the sand was soft behind him. He saw a rocket go up on a tail of flame from the station, and waited for the sound of its blast, but he was already asleep when it came.

It was far past midnight when he became conscious of the dog licking wetly at his ear and cheek. He pushed the animal away with a low curse and mopped at the side of his face. He stirred, and groaned. His feet were burning up! He tried to pull them toward him, but they wouldn't budge. There was something wrong with his legs.

For an instant he stared wildly around in the night. Then he remembered where he was, closed his eyes and shuddered. When he opened them again, the moon had emerged from behind a cloud, and he could see clearly the cruel trap into which he had accidentally stumbled. A pile of old boards, a careful stack of new lumber, a pick and shovel, a sand-pile, heaps of fresh-turned earth, and a concrete mixer—well, it added up.

He gripped his ankles and pulled, but his feet wouldn't budge. In sudden terror, he tried to stand up, but his ankles were clutched by the concrete too, and he fell back in the sand with a low moan. He lay still for several minutes, considering carefully.

He pulled at his left foot. It was locked in a vise. He tugged even more desperately at his right foot. It was equally immovable.

He sat up with a whimper and clawed at the rough concrete until his nails tore and his fingertips bled. The surface still felt damp, but it had hardened while he slept.

He sat there stunned until Hooky began licking at his scuffed fingers. He shouldered the dog away, and dug his hands into the sand-pile to stop the bleeding. Hooky licked at his face, panting love.

“Get away!” he croaked savagely.

The dog whined softly, trotted a short distance away, circled, and came back to crouch down in the sand directly before Hoge, inching forward experimentally.

Hoge gripped fistfuls of the dry sand and cursed between his teeth, while his eyes wandered over the sky. They

came to rest on the sliver of light—the space station—rising in the west, floating out in Big Bottomless where the gang was—Nichols and Guerrera and Lavrenti and Fats. And he wasn't forgetting Keeseey, the rookie who'd replaced him.

Keeseey would have a rough time for a while—rough as a cob. The pit was no playground. The first time you went out of the station in a suit, the pit got you. Everything was falling, and you fell with it. Everything. The skeletons of steel, the tire-shaped station, the spheres and docks and nightmare shapes—all tied together by umbilical cables and flexible tubes. Like some crazy sea-thing they seemed, floating in a black ocean with its tentacles bound together by drifting strands in the dark tide that bore it.

Everything was pain-bright or dead black, and it wheeled around you, and you went nuts trying to figure which way was down. In fact, it took you months to teach your body that *all* ways were down and that the pit was bottomless.

He became conscious of a plaintive sound in the wind, and froze to listen.

It was a baby crying.

It was nearly a minute before he got the significance of it. It hit him where he lived, and he began jerking frantically at his encased feet and sobbing low in his throat. They'd hear him if he kept that up. He stopped and covered his ears to close out the cry of his firstborn. A light went on in the house, and when it went off again, the infant's cry had ceased.

Another rocket went up from the station, and he cursed it. Space was a disease, and he had it.

"Help!" he cried out suddenly. "I'm stuck! Help me, help me!"

He knew he was yelling hysterically at the sky and fighting the relentless concrete that clutched his feet, and after a moment he stopped.

The light was on in the house again, and he heard faint sounds. The stirring-about woke the baby again, and once more the infant's wail came on the breeze.

Make the kid shut up, make the kid shut up . . .

But that was no good. It wasn't the kid's fault. It wasn't Marie's fault. No fathers allowed in space, they said, but it wasn't their fault either. They were right, and he had only himself to blame. The kid was an accident, but that didn't change anything. Not a thing in the world. It remained a tragedy.

A tumbler had no business with a family, but what was a man going to do? Take a skinning knife, boy, and make yourself a eunuch. But that was no good either. They needed bulls out there in the pit, not steers. And when a man came down from a year's hitch, what was he going to do? Live in a lonely shack and read books for kicks? Because you were a man, you sought out a woman. And because she was a woman, she got a kid, and that was the end of it. It was nobody's fault, nobody's at all.

He stared at the red eye of Mars low in the southwest. They were running out there now, and next year he would have been on the long long run . . .

But there was no use thinking about it. Next year and the years after belonged to *little* Hoge.

He sat there with his feet locked in the solid concrete of the footing, staring out into Big Bottomless while his son's cry came from the house and the Hauptman men-folk came wading through the tall grass in search of someone who had cried out. His feet were stuck tight, and he wouldn't ever get them out. He was sobbing softly when they found him.

BULKHEAD

by
Theodore Sturgeon

Miller posed a problem—a problem as old as Cain in its basic meaning; as new, in its special complexities, as the Satellite our government is right now building in the sky over our heads.

This problem, in all its many ramifications (physiological and psychological), is currently being studied by the U.S. Air Force at Randolph Field, Texas. They call it "Space Medicine"; their object is to make certain that human minds and bodies will be able to survive the Big Jump, when we make it.

Now Theodore Sturgeon—the Man With The Golden Pen; for my money, the top writer among established "names" in s-f—deals with an aspect of the same problem on a future level of technology and psychology far more complex than either the U.S. Air Force's Department of Space Medicine or the hero of The Hoofer have to contend with.

You just don't look through viewports very often.

It's terrifying at first, of course—all that spangled blackness and the sense of disorientation. Your guts never get used to sustained free-fall and you feel, when you look out, that every direction is *up*, which is unnatural, or that every direction is *down*, which is sheer horror. But you don't stop looking out there because it's terrifying. You stop because nothing ever happens out there. You've no sensation of speed.

You're not going anywhere.

After the weeks and months, there's some change, sure;

but from day to day, you can't see the difference, so after a while you stop looking for any.

Naturally, that eliminates the viewports as an amusement device, which is too bad. There aren't so many things for a man to do during a Long Haul that he can afford to eliminate anything.

Getting bored with the infinities outside is only a reminder that the same could happen with your writing materials, and the music, the stereo and all the rest of it.

And it's hard to gripe, to say, "Why don't they install a such-and-such on these barrels?" because you've already got what a thousand spacemen griped about long since—many of them men with more experience, more imagination and less internal resources (that is to say, more need) than you'll ever have. Certainly more than you have now; this is your first trip and you're just making the transition from "inside looking out" to "inside looking on."

It's a small world. It *better* be a little complicated.

A lot that has happened in worlds' like these would be simple to understand, if you knew about it. Not knowing is better, though; it keeps you wondering. Some of it you can figure out, knowing as you do that a lot of men have died in these things, a lot have disappeared, ship and all, and some (but you don't know how many) have been taken out of the ships and straight to the laughing academy.

You find out fairly soon, for example, that the manual controls are automatically relayed out, and stay out of temptation until you need them to land. (Whether they'll switch in if you need them for evasive maneuvering some time, you don't know yet.) Who died—how many died—because they started playing with the manual controls? And was it because they decided to quit and go home? Or because they convinced themselves that the auto-astrogator had bugs in it? Or because they just couldn't stand all those stationary stars?

Then there's this: You're alone. You have a shipmate, but even so, you're alone. You crouch in this little cell in the nose of your ship, with the curving hull to your left and the flat wall of the midship bulkhead to your right.

Because it's there, that bulkhead, you know that in previous models it wasn't. You can imagine what happened in some (how many?) ships to make it necessary to seal you away from your shipmate.

Psychodynamics has come a long way, but you called this a world; well, reduce a world to two separate nations and see what happens. Between two confined entities, there's no mean and no median, and no real way of determining a majority. How many battered pilots have come home crazed, cooped up with the shredded bodies of their shipmates?

So that's easy to understand—you can't trust two human beings together. Not for long enough. If you don't believe it, look at the bulkhead. It's there because it *has* to be there.

Being a peaceable guy, it scares you a little to know how dangerous you are.

Makes you a little proud, though, doesn't it?

Be proud of this, too—that they trust you to be alone so much. Sure, there is a shipmate; but by and large you're alone, and that's what's expected of you. What most people, especially Earthside people, never find out is that a man who can't be by himself is a man who knows, away down deep, that he's not good company. You could probably make it by yourself altogether . . . but you must admit you're glad you don't have to. You have access to the other side of the bulkhead, when you need it. If you need it. It didn't take you too long to figure out you'd use it sparingly.

You have books and you have games, you have pictures and text tapes and nine different euphorics (with a watchdog dispenser, so you can never become an addict) all of which help you, when you need help, to explore yourself. But having another human mind to explore is a wonderful idea—a wonder tempered by the knowledge—oh, how smart you were to figure it out in time!—that the other mind is a last resort. If you ever use up the potentialities it holds for you, you're through, brother!

So you have endurance contests with yourself to see how

long you can leave that bulkhead alone.

You go back over your life, the things you've done. People have written whole novels about 24 hours in a man's life. That's the way you think it all out, slowly, piece by piece; every feature of every face and the way they were used; what people did and why. Especially why. It doesn't take any time to remember what a man did, but you can spend hours in thinking about why he did it.

You live it again and it's like being a little god, knowing what's going to happen to everyone.

When you reported to Base, there was a busload of guys with you. Now you know who would go all the way through the course and wind up out here; reliving it, you can put yourself back in the bus again and say, "That stranger across the aisle is Pegg. He isn't going to make it. He'll go home on furlough three months from now and he'll try to kill himself rather than come back. The freckled nape in the seat ahead of you belongs to the redhead Walkinok, who will throw his weight around during his first week and pay expensively for it afterward. But he'll make it."

You make friends with the shy dark guy next to you. His name is Stein and he looks like a big-brain. He's easy to talk to and smart, the kind of fellow who always goes straight to the top. And he won't last even until the first furlough; two weeks is all he can take, and you never see him again. But you remember his name. You remember everything and you go back over it and remember the memories in between the memories. Did somebody on that bus have shoes that squeaked? Back you go and hunt for it. If it happened, you'll remember it.

They say anyone can recall this way; but for you, with what the psycho-dynamicians have done to you—or is it *for* you?—you can do more of this than anybody. There isn't anything that ever happened in your whole life that you can't remember. You can start at the beginning and go all the way through. You can start at the beginning and jump years in a second and go through an episode again . . . get mad again . . . fall in love again.

And when you get tired of the events themselves, you can run them off again, to find out why. Why did Stein go through those years of study and preparation, those months of competition, when all the time he didn't *want* to be in the Space Service? Why did Pegg conceal from himself that he wasn't fit for the Space Service?

So you cast back, comb, compare and ponder, keeping busy. If you're careful, just remembering lasts a long time, wondering why lasts even longer; and in between times, there are the books and stereos, the autochess and the music . . . until you're ready to cast and comb in your memories again. But sooner or later—later, if you're especially careful—you'll get restless and your life as it was played out, and the reasons why it was played just that way, all that gets old. You can think of no new approach to any of it and learn nothing more from it.

That's where the centerline bulkhead comes in handy. Its very shape is a friendly thing to you; the hull on your left is curved, being part of the ship's side, but the bulkhead is a flat wall. Its constant presence is a reminder that it has a function, like everything else in your world; that it is, by nature, a partition; that the existence of a partition presupposes another compartment; and that the other compartment is the size and shape of this one and designed for a similar purpose—to be a dwelling for someone.

With no sound nor sign of occupancy, the bulkhead still attests the life behind it, just by being there. It's a friendly flatness, a companionable feature of your world, and its company pervades all your thinking.

You know it's your last resort, but you know, too, that it's a rich one, and when at last you're driven to use it, you'll enter another kind of world, more complex and more engrossing than your own, just for the work it takes to get from place to place and the mystery of the fog between the places. It's a mind, another human mind, sharing this prison with you when at last you need sharing more than anything whatever in all of space.

Who is it?

You think about that. You think a whole lot about that.

Back at Base, in your last year, you and the other cadets thought about that more than anything. If they'd ever given you the shadow of a hint . . . but no; wondering about it was apparently part of your training. You knew only that on your Long Haul, you would not be alone. You had a pretty good idea that the choice of a shipmate for you would be a surprise.

You looked around you at mess, in class, in the dormitory; you lay awake at night dealing out their faces in a sort of solitaire game; and sometimes you thought about one and said, "That'd be fine. We'd get along." And sometimes you said, "That stinker? Lock me up with *him* and that bulkhead won't be tough enough. I'll kill him after the third day, so help me!"

And after they tapped you for your first Haul, this was the only thing you were scared about—who'd be your shipmate. Everything else, you thought you could handle. You knew your job inside out and backward and it wouldn't whip you. You were sharp-tuned, fine-honed, ready for anything that was under your own control. You were even confident about being alone; it wouldn't get you. Not a chance.

Away down deep, no man believes he can be driven out of his mind, just as he cannot believe—really believe—that he will be dead. That's the kind of thing that happens to someone else.

But this business of a shipmate—this wasn't under your control. You didn't control who it would be and you wouldn't control the guy after blastoff. It was the only unknown and therefore the only thing that scared you.

Amendment: there was a certain amount of control. The intercom button was on your side of the bulkhead. Leave it alone and you didn't have to so much as know you had a shipmate until you were good and ready.

Being able to shut off a voice isn't control, though. You don't know what your shipmate will do. Or *be*.

In those last tight days before blastoff, there was one thing you became overwhelmingly aware of. *Esprit de*

corps, they call it. You and the other graduates were hammered into a mold—and hammered some more until the resiliency was gone out of you. You were alike and you did things alike because you had grown to want to. You knew for certain that one of this tight, trustworthy little group would be picked for you; their training and yours, their whole lives and yours, pointed toward this ship, this Haul.

Your presence on this ship summed up your training; your training culminated in your presence on the ship. Only a graduate cadet was fit to man the ship; the ship existed solely for the graduate cadet. This was something so self-evident that you never thought about it.

Not until now.

Because now, a few minutes ago, you were ready to push that button. You couldn't know if you'd broken all records for loneliness, for duration of solitary confinement, but you'd tried. You'd looked through the viewport until it ceased to mean anything. You'd read until you didn't care any more. You'd lived the almost-life of the stereos until you could *it* make believe you believed them. You'd listened to music until it didn't matter. And you'd gone over and over your life from its very beginnings until you'd completely lost perspective on it or anything and anyone in it.

You'd found that you could go back to the viewport and cycle through the whole thing again, but you'd done that, too, so often that the whole matrix of personal involvement was emptied out. Then the flatness of the bulkhead made itself felt. In a way, it seemed to bulge toward you, crowd you against the ship's side, and you knew it was getting to be time you pushed that button and found out for sure.

Who?

Pete or Krakow or that crazy redheaded Walkinok? Or Wendover (you all called him Bendover) with all those incomprehensible shaggy-dog stories? Harris? Beerbelly Flacker or Cohen the Wire-haired Terror? Or Shank (what

you all called him was a shame)? Or Gindes, whose inexplicable nickname was Mickey Mouse? You'd sort of hoped it would be Gindes, not because you liked him, but more because he was the one classmate you'd never known very well. He always used to look on and keep his mouth shut. He'd be much more fun to explore than, say, old Shank, who was so predictable that you could practically talk in chorus with him.

So you've tortured yourself, just for the sake of torture, with your thumb over the intercom button, until even the torture dried out and blew away.

You pushed.

You found out, first of all, that the intercom apparently had its own amplifier, energized when you held the button down, and that it took forever—well, three or four seconds, anyway—to warm up. First nothing, then a carrier, then the beginning of a signal; then, at last, the voice of your shipmate, rushing up to full volume, as loud and as clear as if the bulkhead did not exist. And you get off that button as if it had turned into a needle; and you're backed against the outboard bulkhead, deep in shock, physically in silence, but with that voice going on and on and on unbelievably in your unbelieving brain.

It was crying.

It wept wearily, as though you had tuned in toward the end of a long session of wild and lonesome grief. It cried quietly, exhaustedly, without hope. And it cried in a voice that was joltingly wrong for this place—a light, high voice, nearly a contralto. It was wrong, altogether wrong.

The wild ideas come first: *Stowaway?*

You almost laugh. For days before blastoff, you were drugged and immersed in high-frequency fields; hypnotized, worked and reworked mentally and physically. You were passively fed and passively instructed.

You don't know now and you may never know all they did to you. But you can be sure it was done inside six concentric rings of "security" of one kind and another, and you can be sure that your shipmate got the same. What it amounted to was concentrated *attention* from a mob of

specialists, every sleeping and waking second from the time you beered it up at the class farewell dinner to the time the accelerator tug lifted your ship and carried it screaming up and outward. Nobody was in this ship but those who belonged in it; that you can absolutely bank on.

Mad idea, the second. For a while, you don't even dare think it, but with that kind of voice, that crying, you have to think of something. So you do and you're scared, scared in a way you've never imagined before, and to a degree you didn't think was possible. *There's a girl in there!*

You run those wordless syllables, those tired sobs, through your mind again, seeking for vocalizations as separated from the breathy, painful gasping that accompanied them. And you don't know. You just can't be certain.

So punch the button again. Listen some more.

Or ask.

But you can't. The crazy idea might be true and you couldn't stand that. They couldn't—they just couldn't—put a girl on these ships with you and then stow her behind the bulkhead.

Then you have an instant fantasy about that. You kneel (bumping your skull on the cover) and feel frantically around the bulkhead, where it meets deck-plates, nose compartment, overhead, after-bulkhead; and all around your fingers ride the bead of a weld. You sit back, sweating a little and half-laughing at yourself. Scratch off one fantasy; there'll be no sliding partitions into any harems this trip.

You stop laughing and think. "They couldn't be that cruel!" You're on a test run, sure, and it isn't the ship that's being tested. You know that and you accept it. But tests, tests . . . must you throw a glass vase on a brick sidewalk to find out if it's brittle? You see one of your own hands going up and out to check for a panel, a joint again. You sneer at it, at your own hand, and watch it stop in embarrassment.

Well, say they weren't that cruel. Whom did they put in

there?

Not Walkinok. Not Shank. Not Harris or Cohen or any cadet. A cadet wouldn't lie there and cry like that, like a child, a schoolgirl—a baby.

Some stranger, then.

Now the anger comes, shouldering out all the fear. They wouldn't! This ship is everything a cadet was born for—no, made for. That tight leash that bound you with the others, all your thinking, an easy thing you all shared and never had to think about—that was a thing that didn't admit strangers.

Aside from that—beyond that—this wasn't a matter of desecrated *esprit*; it was a matter of moral justice. Nobody but a cadet *deserves* a ship! What did you give your life to and what for? Why did you give up marriage, and freedom, and all the wonderful trivialities called "fun" that made most human lives worth living? Why did you hold still for Base routines and the hazing you got from the upper classmen?

Just to have some stranger, someone who wasn't even a cadet, wander in without training, shaping, conditioning, experience . . . and get on your ship?

No, it has to be a cadet. It couldn't be anything else. Even a cadet who could break down and cry—that's a more acceptable idea than its being a woman or a stranger.

You're still angry, but now it's the kind of anger that goads you, not the kind that stops you. You push the button. You hear the carrier, then the beginnings of something else . . . Breathing. Difficult, broken breathing, the sound of someone too tired to cry any more, even when crying has changed nothing and there are still more tears to come.

"What the hell are you bawling about?" you yell.

The breathing goes on and on. Finally it stops for a moment and then a long, whispery, shuddery sigh.

"Hey!" you shout. "Hey—you in there!"

But there is no answer. The breathing is fainter, more regular. Whoever it is is going to sleep.

You press even harder on the button, as if that would do any good, and you yell again, this time not even "Hey!" but a blunter, angrier syllable. You can think only that your shipmate chooses—*chooses*, by God!—not to answer you.

You're breathing hard now, but your shipmate isn't. You hold your breath and listen. You hear the deep, quiet inhalations, and then a small catch, and a little sigh, the ghost of half a sob.

"Hey!"

Nothing.

You let the button go and in the sharp silence that replaces the carrier's faint hum, the same wordless syllable builds and builds inside you until it bursts free again. You can tell from the feel of your throat and the ringing in your ears that it's been a long, long time since you used your voice.

You're angry and you're hurt from these insults to yourself and to your Service. And you know what? You feel good. Some of the stereos you have are pretty nice; they take you right into battle, into the arms of beautiful women, into danger, and from time to time you could get angry at someone in them. You could—but you haven't for a long time now. You haven't laughed or been angry ever since . . . since . . . well, you can't even remember when. You'd forgotten how and you'd forgotten just when it was you forgot. And now look. The heart's going, the sweat . . .

This is fine.

Push the button again, take another little sip of anger. It's been aging; it's vintage stuff. Go ahead.

You do, and up comes the carrier.

"Please," begs the voice. "Please, please . . . say something else."

Your tongue is paralyzed and you choke, suddenly, when you swallow wrong. You cough violently, let go the button and pound yourself on the chest. For a moment, you're in bad shape. Coughing makes your thinking go in spurts,

and your thinking is bouncing up and down on the idea that, until now, you didn't really believe there was anyone in there at all. You get your wind and push the button again.

The voice asks, "Are you all right? Can I do anything?"

You become certain of something else: that isn't a voice you recognize. If you ever heard it before, you certainly don't remember it. Then the content of it hits you. *Can I do anything?* You get mad again.

"Yeah," you growl. "Hand me a glass of water." You don't have your thumb on the button, so you just say what pops into your mind. You shake yourself like a wet bird dog, take a deep breath, and lean on the control again.

Before you can open your mouth, you're in a hailstorm of hysterical laughter. "Glass of water . . . uh-uh-uh . . . that's good . . . you don't know what this means," says the voice, suddenly sober and plaintive. "I've waited so long. I've listened to your music and the sound from your stereos. You never talk, you never say anything at all. I never even heard you cough before."

Part of your mind reacts to that: *That's unnatural, not even to cough, or laugh aloud, or hum. Must be a conditioning.* But most of it explodes at this stranger, this—intruder, talking away like that without a word of explanation, of apology . . . talking as if that voice of all voices had a right to be there.

"I was beginning to think you were deaf and dumb. Or maybe even that you weren't there at all. That was the thing that scared me the most."

"Shut up," you hiss, with all the fury, all the deadly warning you can command.

"I knew they wouldn't," the voice continues happily. "They'd never put anyone out here by himself. That would be too—" It stops abruptly as you release the button.

"My God!" you think. "The dam has boist! That character'll chunter along like that for the duration!"

You press the button quickly, hear "—all alone out here, you get scared to look out the viewp—" and you cut off again.

That stuff like an invisible mist you see melting away is all the conjecture, those great half-formed plans of shipping out with Walkinok or the Wirehaired Terror.

You were going to review your courses, remember? Slow and easy—take a week on spatial ballistics or spectroscopy. Think it all through for a day between sentences. Or laugh over the time you and the Shank got tanked up at the canteen and pretended you were going to tie up the C.O. and jet him off with Colonel Provost, the head PD man, for a shipmate. The General would get all the psychodynamics he needed. The General was always talking psychodynamics, Provost was always doing psychodynamics.

Well, it seemed funny at the time, anyway. It wasn't so much the beer. It was knowing the General and knowing Colonel Provost that made it funny. How funny would it be with a stranger?

They give you someone to talk to. They give you someone you haven't anything to talk to *about*! That idea of putting a girl behind the bulkhead, now, that was a horrible idea. It was torture. Well, so's this. Maybe worse.

A thought keeps knocking and you finally back off and let it in. Something to do with the button. You push it and you can hear your shipmate. You release it and . . . shut off the intercom?

No, by the Lord, you don't! When you were coughing, you were off that button. *Can I do anything?*

Now what the hell kind of business is this? (And that detached part of your mind reaches hungrily for the pulses of fury: ah, it feels good!) Do you mean to sit there and tell me (you rage silently at the PD men who designed this ship) that even if I don't push that button, my shipmate can hear everything that goes on with me? The intercom's open on the other side all the time, open on this side only when I push the button—is that it?

You turn and glare out the viewport, staring down the cold, distant eye of infinity, and *Where the hell*, you storm silently, *is my privacy?*

This won't do. It won't do at all. You figured right from the start that you and your shipmate would be pretty

equal, but on a ship, even a little two-passenger can like this, someone's got to be in command. Given that the other compartment has the same stereos, the same dispensers, the same food and water and everything else, and the only difference between these living quarters is that button—who's privileged? Me, because I get to push the button? Or my shipmate, who gets to listen in on me when I so much as cough?

"I know!" you think suddenly. "That's a PD operative in there! A psychodynamics specialist assigned to observe me!"

You almost laugh out loud; relief washes over you. PD work is naturally hush-hush. You'll never know how many hours during your course you were under hypnosis. It was even rumored around that some guys had cerebral surgery done by the PD boys and never knew it. The boys had to work in secret for the same reason you don't stir your coffee with an ink-stick—PD is one field where the tools must leave no mark.

Well, fine, fine. At last this shipmate makes some sense: at last you've got an answer you can accept. This ship, this trip, is of and for a cadet—but it's PD business. The only non-cadet who'd conceivably be aboard would have to be a PD tech.

So you grin and reach for the button. Then, remembering the way it works, that the intercom's open from your side when you're off the button, you draw your hand back, face the bulkhead, and say easily, "Okay, PD, I'm on to you. How'm I doing?" You wonder how many cadets tumble to the trick this soon. You push the button and wait for the answer.

The answer is "Huh?" in a mixture of shyness and mystification.

You let go the button and laugh. "No sense stringing it out, Lieutenant." (This is clever. Most PD techs are looeys; one or two are master sergeants. Right or not, you haven't hurt his feelings.) "I know you're a PD man."

There's a silence from the other side. Then: "What's a

PD man?"

You get a little sore. "Now see here, Lieutenant, you don't have to play any more of these psych games."

"Gosh, I'm no lieutenant. I—"

You cut him off quickly. "Sergeant, then."

"You got me all wrong," says that damnable high voice.

"Well, you're PD, anyway."

"I'm afraid I'm not."

You can't take much more of this. "Then what the hell are you?"

A silence. And as it beats by, that anger and that fear of torture begin to mount, hand in hand.

"Well?" you roar.

"Well," says the voice, and you can practically see it shuffle its feet. "I'm not anything. I'm fifteen years old . . ."

You drag out your senior-class snap; there's a way of talking to fourth and third classmen that makes 'em jump. "Mister, you give an account of yourself, but now. What's your name?"

"Skampi."

"Skampi? What the hell kind of a name is that?"

"It's what they call me."

Did you detect a whisper of defiance there? "Sir!"

The defiance disappears instantly. "It's what they call me . . . sir."

"And what are you doing on my ship, mister?"

A frightened gulp. "I—I'm sorry—uh—sir. They put me on."

"They?"

"At the Base . . . sir," he amended quickly.

"You were on the Base just how long, mister?" That "mister" can be a lead-shot whiplash if you do it right. It was sure being done right.

"I don't know, sir." You have the feeling the punk's going to burst into tears again. "They took me to a big laboratory and there were a lot of sort of booths with machines in them. They asked me all kinds of questions about did I want to be a spaceman. Well, I did. I always did, ever since I was a kid. So, after a while, they put me on

a table and gave me a shot and when I woke up, I was here."

"Who gave you a shot? What was his name?"

"I never . . . I didn't find out, sir." A pause. "A big man. Old. He had gray hair, very short, and green eyes."

Provost, by God. This is PD business, all right, but from where you sit, it's monkey business.

"You know any spatial ballistics?"

"No, sir. Some day, I—"

"Astrogation?"

"Only what I picked up myself. But I'll—"

"Gravity mechanics? Differentials? Strength of materials? Light-metal fission? Relativity?"

"I—"

"Well? *Well?* Speak up, mister!"

"I heard of them, sir."

"'I heard of them, sir!'" you mimic savagely. "Do you know what this ship is for?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Everybody knows that. This is the Long Haul. When you come back from this, you get your commission and they give you a starship!" And if the voice had shuffled its feet once, now its eyes shone.

"You figure to get a starship, mister?"

"Well, I—I—"

"You think they give commands to Boy Scouts just because the Boy Scout wants to go to space *awful* bad?"

No answer.

You jeer, "Have you got the slightest idea how much training a cadet has to go through, how much he has to learn?"

"Well, no, but I guess I will."

"Sir!"

"Sir. They put me aboard, all those officers who asked me the questions and everything. It must be all right. *Hey!*" he says excitedly, all the crushed timidity disappearing, to be replaced by a bubbling enthusiasm. "I know! We have all this time . . . maybe you're supposed to teach me astrogation and relativity and all that."

Your jaw drops at the sheer childishness of it. And then

something really ugly drifts up and smothers everything else.

For some reason, your mind flashes back to the bus, the day you got to Base. You can remember back easily to all the faces you worked with, those who made it and those who didn't. But your class had thirty-eight cadets in it and that bus must have held fifty. What happened to the rest? You'd always assumed they went into other sections—ground crew, computer men, maintenance. Suppose they'd been sorted out, examined for some special trait or talent that only the PD men knew about? Suppose they were loaded right aboard ships, each with a graduate cadet?

And why?

Suppose these punks, greenhorns, Boy Scouts, *children*—suppose they were the ones slated for a commission? Suppose guys like you, *thinking* all this while you were the cream of the crop, and the top cream off that—suppose all along you'd tested out as second-grade material. Suppose you were the one who did the sweating and cramming and took the hazing and the demerits and the lousy mess-hall food, not to command a starship, not to get a commission, but just to be a private tutor to a boy genius who wanted to go to space *awful* bad?

This wouldn't make sense anywhere else but in the starship service. It barely made sense there, but look:

A starship commander might make two trips in his whole career, that's all. Eighteen years each round trip, with his passengers in coldpacks and a cargo of serums, refractories, machine tools and food concentrate for the xenologists and mineralogists who were crazy enough to work out there.

Training the commander for such a ship was easy, as far as operating knowledge was concerned, though there was a powerful lot of it. But training him to stay conscious, awake and aware—and alone—for all those years was something else again. Few men like that were born; they had to be made.

Most of your recluses, your hermits, all through history,

have been guys who had things drastically wrong with them. There couldn't be anything wrong with a starship commander. He had to be captain and deck crew, and know his black-hole as well (though most of the drive machinery down there was automatic) and stay alert—stay *sane*—in a black, mad, weightless emptiness God never made him for.

Give him more books and pictures, games and music than even he would have time for and you'd still not be sure he'd stay sane unless he had some very special inner resources.

These (and one other thing) were what a cadet was screened for and what he was trained in. PD packed him full of technical knowledge, psyched him to a fare-thee-well, and when they figured he was machine-finished and carrying a high gloss, they sealed him in a space can and threw it out for the Long Haul.

The course was pre-set, and it might last 14 months, and it might last three years, and after a guy got back (if he got back), he would be fit to take out a starship or he would not. As for the shipmate—well, you'd always assumed that PD was looking for a way to shake down two guys at once so they could be together on a starship.

Maybe, some day, the ships would carry eight, ten at once, and at last natural human gregariousness would have a chance to compete with the pall of black distances. So far, though, psychic disorientation had made everything that was latently mean and murderous in a man explode into action. Putting more than a single human being on those boats to nurse them through was just asking for slaughter. And shipwreck.

The other thing required of you besides technical ability and these inner resources is—youth. You're only twenty-two, so full of high-intensity training that, as Walkinok once said, you feel your brain convolutions are blown out smooth like a full bladder. And you've compacted this knowledge, coded it, used it. You're so full of it that it's bound to ooze out onto anyone around you.

You're twenty-two and you're sealed up in a can with a thirsty-headed fifteen-year-old who knows nothing, but wants to go to the stars *awful* bad. And you can forget how stupid he seems to be, too, because you can bet your bulging cortex that the kid has such an enormous I.Q. that he can afford to act stupid and cry.

What a dirty, rotten, lousy deal to put you through all this just to shave seven years off the age of a starship commander! Next thing you know, they'd put a diapered baby in with a work-weary sucker of a fine-honed cadet and get three star trips out of him instead of two!

And what's to become of *you*? After you've done your generous stint of tutoring, they pin a discharge emblem on your tunic and say, "Well done, Cadet. Now go raise Brussels sprouts." And you stand at attention and salute the downy-cheeked squirt in all the gold braid and watch him ride the gantry crane to the control cabin you've aimed at and sweated for ever since you were weaned!

You sprawl there in that living space, so small that you can't stand up in it, and you look at that bland belly of a bulkhead with its smooth, round navel of a button, and you think, "Well, there's a lot of guts back of that." You heave a deep breath, while still the detached part of your mind looks on. Now it's saying wonderingly, "Aren't you the guy who was scared because nothing could get him excited any more?" And you speak and your voice comes out sounding quite different from anything you've ever heard from anyone before. Maybe you've never been this mad before.

"Who told you to say that?"

You push the button and listen.

"Say what—uh—sir?"

"About me teaching you. Anybody at Base?"

He seems to be thinking. "Why, no, sir. I just thought it would be a good idea."

You don't say anything. You just hold the button down.

He says diffidently, "Sort of pass the time?" When you still don't say anything, he adds wistfully, "I'd try. I'd try

awful hard."

You let go the button and growl, "I just bet you would. You just thought it up all your own little self, huh?"

"Well, yes."

"You're a bright boy. You're a real, smart, ambitious little *louse*!"

You push the button real quick, but all you get is an astonished silence.


You say, real composed, almost gentle, "That '*louse*,' now, that's not just a figure of speech, little boy. I mean that. I mean you're a crummy little crawler looking to suck blood after somebody else has done all the work. You know what you do? You just make like you're all alone in this can. You don't talk to me and you don't listen to me and I'll do you a favor—I'll forget all about you, too. I'm not going to bat your eyeballs together just yet, but don't call me generous, little boy—never that. It's just that I can't reach in there just now."

"No!" That boy can make a real piteous noise when he wants to. "No, no! Wait—please!"

"Well?"

"I don't under—I mean I'm sorry, Cadet. I'm honest-to-Pete sorry. I never meant—"

But you cut him off. You lie back and close your eyes. You're thrumming with fury right down to your toenails.

This  says your internal observer, is all right. This is living.

So the weeks pass, and so do more weeks. You shoot a star and make some notes, and wait a while and shoot it again, and pretty soon you have enough data to fool around with. You get your stylus and block, and the point darts around the way you want it to, and those old figures sit up and lie down and rush around just the way you want them to. You laugh when you do it; wouldn't Junior just love to learn some of these tricks?

Anyway, you figure you're just past the cusp perihelion of your parabola and you're starting back. You know how

far you've come and when you'll get back. You laugh again. The sound of your voice reminds you he can hear you, so you crawl over to the bulkhead and push the button.

"Cadet," he says. "Please, Cadet. Please." His voice is hoarse and weak; the syllables come out as if they're meaningless from repetition. He's probably been lying in there for weeks bleating "Cadet—please—Cadet—please" every time you clicked the stylus against your teeth or set the quadrant on your Sun gun.

You spend a lot of time looking out the viewport, but you get sick of that and turn to the euphorics. You see a lot of stereo shows. You are always aware of the button in the bulkhead, but you ignore it. You read. You get a lot of use out of the octant; it seems you take a lot more bearings than you have to. And when at last the button starts to be intrusive, you make a real effort and leave it alone; you figure out something else to do instead.

You take a careful survey of your instruments to figure which one you need least, and finally decide on the airspeed indicator. You've spent plenty of time in a mockup and you know you can compute your airspeed when you return to Earth by the hull-temperature plus your ground-rise radar.

You dismount the instrument and take it apart and get the diamond bearing. You go through the games locker and the equipment chest until you put together a nickel rod and a coil, and you hook on to your short-range radio where the oscillations suit you. You cement the diamond to the tip of the rod, shove the rod through the long axis of the coil. You turn on the juice and feel (rather than hear) the rod humming softly.

"The phenomenon, dear pupil," you say, but silently, "is magneto-striction, whereby the nickel rod contracts slightly in the magnetic field. And since the field is in oscillation, that diamond on the tip is vibrating like crazy."

You get your stylus and, after careful consideration, decide on a triangle with round corners, just big enough to shove an arm through comfortably; the three corners would make peepholes.

All the while, you have quick fantasies about it. You'll knock the triangular piece out of the bulkhead and stick your face in the hole and say "*Surprise!*" and he'll be cowering there, wondering what goes on. And you'll say, "Shake and let bygones be." And he'll jump over, all eager, and you'll take his hand and drag it through the hole and put your back against the bulkhead and pull till his shoulder dislocates.

He's gasping, "Cadet, please," until you get tired of amusing yourself and haul the wrist around and sink your teeth in it. Then he starts to bleed, and you just hold him there while "Cadet-please" gets fainter and fainter, and you explain to him all about differential equations and mass-ratios.

And as you're thinking about this, you're going round and round the blunted triangle with your vibrating diamond. The bulkhead is thick as hell and tough—it's hull-metal; imagine that, for an inboard bulkhead!—but that's all right. You've got plenty of time. And bit by bit, your scored line goes deeper.

Every once in a while, you take a breather. It occurs to you to wonder what you'll say when you're grappled in and the Colonel sees that hole in the bulkhead. You try not to wonder about this, but you do all the same, a whole lot. You run it over in your mind and sometimes the Colonel says, "Good, Cadet. That's real resourcefulness, the kind I like to see." But other times it doesn't quite come out that way, especially with the kid dead on one side of the bulkhead and his blood all over the place on the other side.

So maybe you won't kill him. You'll just scare him. Have fun with him.

Maybe he'll talk, too. Maybe this entire Long Haul was set up by PD just to find out if you'd cooperate with your shipmate, try to teach him what you know, at any cost. And you know, if you thought more of the Service than you do about your own dirty career in it, that's just what you'd do. Maybe if you did that, they'd give you a star-ship, you and the kid both.

So, anyway, this cutting job is long and slow and suits

you fine; no matter what you think, you go on with it, just because you started. When it's finished you'll know what to do.

Funny that the result of this trip was going to be the same as some of those you'd heard whispered about, where a ship came in with one guy dead and the other . . .

But that was the difference. To do a thing like that, those guys must have been space-happy. You're doing it, sure, but for different reasons. You're no raving looney. You're slow-and-steady, doing a job, knowing exactly why.

Or you will, when the time comes.

You're real happy this whole time.

Then all that changes.

Just why, you can't know. You turned in and you slept, and all of a sudden you're wide awake. You're thinking about some lab work you did. It was a demonstration of eddy-current effects.

There was a copper disk as thick as your arm and a meter in diameter, swinging from a rope in the center of the gymnasium. You hauled it up to the high ceiling at the far end and turned it loose. There was a big electromagnet set up in the middle of the place, and as the disk reached the bottom of its long swing, it passed between the poles of the magnet, going like hell. You threw the switch and the disk stopped dead right where it was and rang like a big gong, though nothing had touched it.

Then you remember the sixty zillion measurements you'd taken off a synchro-cosmotron so huge that it took you four minutes at a fast walk to get from one end to the other.

You remember the mockups, the hours and hours of hi-G, no-G; one instrument out, another, all of 'em, some of 'em; simulated meteorites on collision orbit; manual landing techniques—until your brains were in your hands and the seat of your pants, and you did the right things with them without thinking. Exhausted, you still did it right. Even doped up.

You remember the trips into town with Harris and Flacker and the others. Something happened to you every time you so much as walked down a street with those guys. It was a thing you'd never told anyone. Part of it was something that happened between the townspeople and your group. Part of it was between your group and yourself. It all added up to being a little different and a little better . . . but not in a cocky way. In a way that made you grateful to the long, heavy bulk of a starship and what such ships are for.

You sit up in your bunk, with that mixed-up, wide-awake feeling, reaching for something you can't quite understand, some one simple thing that would sum up the huge equipment, the thousands of measurements, the hours of cramming and the suspense of examinations; the seat-of-the-pants skills and the pride in town . . .

And now you see what it is.

That kid in there, he could have an I.Q. of nine goddam hundred and never learn how to put down a ship with all his instruments out and the gyros on manual. Not by somebody telling him over an intercom when he's never even sat in a G-seat. He might memorize twelve thousand slightly varying measurements off a linear accelerator, but he wouldn't gain that certain important thing you get when you make those measurements yourself. You could describe the way the copper disk rang when the eddy current stopped it, but he would have to see it happen before it did to him all the things it did to you.

You still don't know who that kid is or why he's here, but you can bet on one thing—he isn't here to pick your brains and take your job. You don't have to like him and you can be mad he's aboard instead of Harris or Walky; but get that junk out of your head right now about him being a menace to you. Goddlemighty Godfrey, where did that poisonous little crumb in your brain come from? Since when are you subject to fear and jealousy and insecurity? Since when do you have to guard yourself against your own imagination?

Come the hell off it, Cadet. You're not that good a teacher; he's not that much of a monster.

'Monster! Did you hear him cry that time?

You feel twenty pounds lighter (which is odd, seeing that you're still in free-fall) and as if you'd just washed your face. "Hey, Krampil!"

You go push the button and wait. Then you hear a sharp inhalation through nostrils. A sniff no, you won't call it that.

"Skampi, sir," he corrects you timidly.

"Okay, whatever you say. And knock off that 'sir.' "

"Yes, sir. I mean yes."

"What were you crying about?"

"When, s—?"

"Okay," you break in gently. "You don't have to talk about it."

"No. I wasn't trying to deny it. I . . . cried twice. I'm sorry you heard me. You must think . . ."

"I don't think," you say sincerely. "Not enough."

He thinks that over and apparently drops it. "I cried right after blastoff."

"Scared?"

"No . . . yes, I was, but that wasn't why. I just . . ."

"Take your time telling me. Time is what we got nothing else but of."

"It was just that I—I'd always wanted to be in space. I thought about it in the daytime and dreamed about it at night. And all of a sudden, there it was, happening to me for real. I thought I ought to say something and I opened my mouth to do it and all of a sudden I was crying. I couldn't help it. I guess I— Crazy, I guess."

"I wouldn't say so. You can hear and talk and see pictures and get yourself all ready, but there's nothing like doing it. I know."

"You, you're used to it."

He seems to want to say something else; you hold the button down. Finally, with difficulty, he asks, "You're big, aren't you? I mean you're . . . you know. Big."

"Well, yes."

"I wish I was. I wish I was good for . . . well, something."

"Everybody push you around?"

"Mm."

"Listen," you say. "You take a human being and put him down next to a starship. They're not the same size and they're not the same shape, and one of 'em's pretty insignificant. But you can say that *this* built *this*, not the other way around."

"Y-e-ah." It is a whisper.

"Well, you're that human being, that self-same one. Ever think of that?"

"No."

"Neither did I, till now," you admit rapidly. "It's the truth, though."

He says, "I wish I was a cadet."

"Where do you come from, kid?"

"Masolo. It's no place. Jerk town. I like big places with big things going on. Like the Base."

"Awful lot of people charging around."

"Yeah," he says. "I don't like crowds much, but the Base—it's worth it."

You sit and look at the bulkhead. It's companionable, suddenly, and sort of changed, as if it had just grown warm, or quilted. You get a splinter of light off the bright metal where you've scored it. You think it's down pretty deep. A man could stand up to it and knock that piece out with a maul, if a man could stand up, if he had a maul.

You say, very fast, as if you're afraid something's going to stop you, "Ever do anything you were really ashamed of? I did when I talked to you the way I did. I shouldn't've done it like that . . . I don't know what got into me. Yes, I do and I'll tell you. I was afraid you were a boy genius planted on me to strip my brains and take my command. I got scared."

It all comes out like that. You feel much better and at the same time you're glad Walkinok or Shank aren't around to hear you spout like that.

The kid's very quiet for a while. Then he says, "One time my mother sent me to the market and something was a special, I forget what. But anyway I had forty cents change and I forgot about it. I found it in my pants in school next day and bought a starship magazine with it and never told her. I used to get every issue that way after that. She never missed the money. Or maybe she did and didn't say anything. We were pretty hard up."

You understand that the kid is trying to give you something, because you apologized to him. You don't say anything more about that. Right here, a wonder starts to grow. You don't know what it is, but you know that stand-off-and-watch part of your mind is working on it.

You say, "Where is this Masolo?"

"Upstate. Not far from Base. Ever since I was a baby, the axitugs were shaking the house when they took off. There's a big tree outside the house and all the leaves shiver—with the tugs, you know. I used to climb out a limb and get on the roof and lie down on my back. Sometimes you could see the starships orbiting. Just after the Sun goes down, sometimes you can . . ." He swallows; you can hear it plainly. "I used to put out my hand. It was like a firefly up there."

"Some firefly," you say.

"Yeah. Some firefly, all right."

Inside you, the wonder is turning to a large and luminous astonishment. It's still inexpressible, so you leave it alone.

The kid is saying, "I was with two other fellows out by the high school one time. I was just a kid—eleven, I think. Well, some gorillas from the high school chased us. We ran and they caught up with us. The other kids started to fight them. I got over to one side and, when I had a chance, I ran. I ran all the way home. I wish I'd stayed there with those other two kids.

"They got the tar kicked out of them and I guess it hurt, but I guess it stopped hurting after some teacher came along and broke up the fight. But I hurt every time I think about running away like that. Boy, did those two give me

a razzing when they saw me next day! *Boy!* So what I wanted to ask you, you don't think a kid who would run away like that could be a cadet."

He ends it like that, flat. No question.

You think about it. You've been in some fine brawls as a cadet. You're in a bar and someone cracks wise, and your blood bubbles up, and you wade in, feeling giant-size. But maybe that's just because of the business of belonging.

You say carefully, "I think if I was in a fight, I'd rather have a guy on my side who knew what being scared felt like. Then it would be like having two guys on my side, instead of one. One of the guys wouldn't care if he got hurt and the other guy would never want to be hurt that way again. I think a fellow like that would be a pretty good cadet."

"Well, yeah," says the kid, in that funny whisper.

Now the inner astonishment bursts into sight and you recognize what it is about this kid.

At first, you were scared of him, but even when that went away, you didn't like him. There was no question of liking him or not liking him; he was a different species that you couldn't have anything to do with.

And the more you talked with him, the more you began to feel that you didn't have to set yourself apart from him, that he had a whole lot you didn't have—and that you could use it. The way he talked, honest and unabashed; you don't know how to do that. You nearly choked to death apologizing to him.

It suddenly is very important to get along with this kid. It isn't because the kid is important. It's because if you can get along with somebody so weak, so wet behind the ears, and yet in his peculiar way so rich, why, you can get along with anybody, even your own lousy self.

And you realize that this thing of getting along with him has extension after extension. Somehow, if you can find more ways to get along with this kid, if you can see more things the way he sees them with no intolerance and no altitude, you'll tap something in yourself that's been

dried up a long time now.

You find all this pretty amazing, and you settle down and talk to the kid. You don't eke it out. You know he'll last all the way back to Base and have plenty left over. You know, too, that by the time you get there, this kid will know a cadet can also be a louse. You can give him that much.

The way you treated him, he was hurt. But you know? He wasn't mad. He doesn't think he's good enough to get mad at a cadet. He thinks a cadet rates what he does just by being a cadet.

Well, you are going to fix that.

The time goes by and the time comes; the acceleration tug reaches out and grabs you high above Earth, so, after all that manual-control drill, you don't have a thing to do but sit there and ride it down.

The tug hovers over the compound right near the administration building, which disappears in a cloud of yellow dust. You sink down and down in the dust cloud until you think they must be lowering you into a hole in the ground. Then, at last, there's a slight thump and an inhuman amount of racket as the tug blasts away free.

After that, there's only the faint whisper of the air circulator, the settling dust, and a profoundly unpleasant feeling in calves and chest as the blood gets used to circulating in a 1-G environment.

"Now don't you forget, Skampi," you say. You find it difficult to talk; you've got a wide grin plastered across your face and you can't cast it adrift. "Just as soon as they're through with you, you come looking for me, hear? I'll buy you a soda."

You lean back in your G-chair and hold the bulkhead button.

"I can drink beer," he says manfully.

"We'll compromise. We'll make your soda with beer. Listen, kid. I can't promise, but I know they're fooling with the idea of a two-man crew for starships. How'd you like to go with me—one trip, anyhow? Of course, you'll

have to be conditioned six ways from the middle, double-time, and it'll be real rough. But—what do you say?"

And you know? He doesn't say anything!

He laughs, though.

Now here comes Colonel Provost, the *big big* brass of Psychodynamics, and a young MP. That's all the welcoming committee you'll get. The compound's walled and locked, and no windows look out on it. They must have unloaded some pretty sorry objects from these space cans from time to time.

They open the hatch from the outside and you immediately start coughing like hell. Your eyes say the dust has settled, but your lungs say no. By the time you have your eyes wiped, the M.P. is inside and squatting on the deck, cross-legged.

He says cheerfully, "Hi, kay-dee. This here's a stun gun and if you so much as squint at me or the Colonel, you get flaked out like a heaving-line."

"Don't worry about me," you say from behind that silly grin. "I got no quarrel with anybody and I like it here. Good morning, Colonel."

"Look out for this one," said the M.P. "Likes it here. He's sick."

"Shut up, wheelhead," says the Colonel cheerfully. He has his gray crewcut and barrel torso shoved into the hatch and it's real crowded in that little cabin. "Well, Cadet, how are we?"

"We're fine," you say. The M.P. cocks his head a little to one side and gets bright-eyed. He thinks you're sassing the C.O., but you're not. When you say "we," you mean you and your shipmate.

"Anything special happen?"

The answer to that is a big fat yes, but it would take forever to tell. It's all recorded, anyway; PD doesn't miss a trick. But that's from then till now, and done with. You're concerned from now on. "Colonel, I want to talk to you right now. It's about my shipmate."

The Colonel leans a little further in and slaps the

M.P.'s gun hand. He's in front of the guy, so you can't see his face. "Beat it, wheelhead."

The M.P. clears out. You stagger up out of the G-seat and climb through the hatch. The Colonel catches your arms as you stagger. After a long time in free-fall, your knees won't lock as you walk; you have to stiffen each one as your weight comes on it, and you have to concentrate. So you concentrate, but that doesn't stop you from talking. You skim over the whole business, from your long solo to being reduced to meeting your shipmate, and the hassel you had with yourself over that, and then this thing that happened with the kid—weeks and weeks of it, and you've only just begun.

"You can pick 'em, sir," you pant as you lurch along. "Do you always use a little know-nothing kid? Where do you find 'em? Does it always work out this well?"

"We get a commander out of every Long Haul," he says.

"Say, that's great, sir!"

"We don't have very many ships," he says, just as cheerfully.

"Oh," you say.

Suddenly you stop. "Wait, sir! What about Skampi? He's still locked in on his side of the bulkhead."

"You first," says the Colonel. You go on into the PD lab. "Up you go."

You look at the big chair with its straps and electrodes and big metal hood.

"You know, they used chairs like these in the French Revolution," you say, showing off. You're just busting with friendliness today. You *never* felt like this. You sit in the big chair. "Look, sir, I want to get started on a project right away. This kid, now—I tell you, he's got a lot on the ball. He's spaceman right to the marrow bones. He comes from right around here, that little place up the pike, Masolo. He got shook out of his bassinet by the axi-tugs. He spent his childhood lying on his back on the roof looking for the starships in orbit. He's—"

"You talk all the time," the Colonel breaks in mildly.

"Sum up, will you? You made out with your shipmate. You think you could do it again in a starship. That it?"

"Think we can try it? Hey, really? Look, can I be the one to tell him, Colonel?"

"Close your mouth and sit still."

Those are orders. You sit still. The Colonel gets you strapped in and connected up. He puts his hand on the switch.

"Where did you say you came from?"

You didn't say, and you don't, because the hood swings down and you're surrounded by a sudden dissonant chord of audio at tremendous amplitude. If you had been allowed to say, though, you wouldn't have known.

The Colonel doesn't even give you time to be surprised at this. You sink into blackness.

It gets light again. You have no idea how much time has passed, but it must be plenty, because the sunlight from outside is a different color and slants in a different way through the venetian blinds. On a bench nearby is a stack of minicans with your case number painted on each one—that'd be the tape record of your Long Haul. There's some stuff in there you're not proud of, but you wouldn't swap the whole story for anything.

"Hello, Colonel," you say with your tongue thick.

"You with us again? Good." He looks at an enlarged filmstrip and back at you. He shows you. It's a picture of the bulkhead with the triangular score in it. "Magnetostriction vibrator, with a diamond bearing for a drill bit, hm? Not bad. You guys scare me. I'd have sworn that bulkhead couldn't be cut and that there was nothing in the ship that could cut it. You must've been real eager."

"I wanted to kill him. You know that now," you say happily.

"You damn near did."

"Aw, now, Colonel! I wouldn't have gone through with it."

"Come on," he says, opening the buckles.

"Where, sir?"

"To your space can. Wouldn't you like to have a look at it from the outside?"

"Cadets aren't permitted—"

"You qualify," says the old man shortly.

So out you go to the compound. The can still stands where it was landed.

"Where's Skampi?" you ask worriedly.

The Colonel just passes you an odd look and walks on. You follow him up to the can. "Here, around the front."

You walk around to the bow and look up at it. It's just the shape it ought to be from the way it looked from inside, except that it looks a little like a picture of a whale caught winking at you.

Winking?

One-eyed!

"Do you mean to tell me you had that kid in a blind compartment, without so much as a viewport?" you rage.

The Colonel pushes you. "Sit down. Over there. On the hatch. You returning heroes and your manic moods . . . *sit down!*"

You sit on the edge of the open hatch.

"Sometimes they fall over when I explain," he says gruffly. "Now what was bothering you?"

"Locking that kid up in a dark—"

"There isn't a kid. There isn't a dark cabin. There's no viewport on that side of the can. It's a hydrazine tank."

"But I—but we—but the—"

"Where do you come from?"

"Masolo, but what's that to—"

"What did your mother and all the kids call you when you were a space-struck teenager?"

"Scampy. They all—*Scampy?*"

"That's right," he says bluntly.

Rocked, you cover your face. "By God! I can remember now, thinking back in detail over my whole life—it started *in the bus* that day I passed the entrance exams. What is it? Please, *what is it?*"

"Well, if you want me to get technical, they call it Dell's

hypothesis. It was formulated way back in the middle of the 20th century by Dudley Dell, which was one of the pseudonyms of a magazine editor. As I remember it, he later became a lay analyst and—"

"Please, Colonel!" You're in trouble.

"Okay, okay," he says soothingly. "Well, up to that time, psychologists—particularly analysts—had been banging their heads against a stone wall in certain cases, and sometimes banging up the patient in the process. Those early therapists knew that childish feelings and motivations were interfering with adult efficiency and happiness. When a man would slam out of his house and do a lousy day's work after a fight with his wife, the doctor would tell him, 'You're acting *as if* you were a child rejected by its mother,' and this was—"

"Colonel, sir, are you going to please tell me what the hell's with *me*?"

"I am," he answers calmly. "This, as I was beginning to explain, was all wrong because the 'as if' concept made the patient disbelieve in this active eight-year-old within him—a very viable, hard-fighting, eight-year-old. It was, too. So when behaviour got more infantile, the doc would pull his beard, or chin, and say, 'Mm-hmm, schizophrenia,' thereby scaring the liverwurst out of the patient. Dell stopped all that."

"Dell stopped all that," you repeat, suffering.

"It was a little thing, that hypothesis of his—little like $E = MC^2$ or Newton's apple—but, oh, my, what happened!"

"Oh, my," you agree. "What happened?"

"Dell began directing therapy to the infantile segment, treating it as a living, thinking, feeling organism. It responded so excellently that it changed the face of psychoanalysis. Now in your case—you're not going to interrupt?"

You shake your head blankly but obediently.

"Good. In your case, an extension of Dell's hypothesis was used. The sum total of your life up until you took your entrance examinations to this Base was arrested at

the age of 15. A hypnotic barrier was erected so that you could have no access to any of this. You—all of you cadets—literally start a new life here, with no ties whatever to an earlier one. Your technical education very deliberately has no reference factors to anything but itself. You learn quickly because your minds are uncluttered. You never miss your past because we're careful never to reactivate it.

"When this approach was first tried, the subjects were graduated with memories only of their training. Well, it didn't work. Childhood conditioning is too important to the entire human being to be wiped out without diminishing the subject in just about every emotional way. So we developed this new system. That's what we used on you.

"But we discovered a peculiar thing. Even in untrained adults—as opposed to the sharp division of pre- and post-entrance you have here—even untrained adults suffer to greater or lesser degree from internal strife between childhood and adult interpretations and convictions. An exaggerated example would be a child's implicit belief in Santa Claus and the Easter bunny, existing at one and the same time with the adult's realization that these are only legends. The inner child—the child within the adult—still exists, according to Dell and to all tests since, and will fight like the very devil for survival, beliefs and all *especially* one whose beliefs and natural feelings and reactions had been made grounds for punishment or ridicule.

"The schism between you and Scampy was extreme; you were, in effect, born on different planets. To be a complete human being, you had to be rejoined; but to be integrated successfully, you and Scampy had to learn how to get along together. For Scampy, this was not difficult—you, even in injustice and cruelty, were a real live hero-image. But the adult you had a stonier path. Somewhere within yourself, though, you somehow found an element of tolerance and empathy, and used it to bridge the gap.

"I may say," the Colonel adds severely, "that it takes a particularly fine kind of person to negotiate this difficult merger. You are not usual, Cadet; not usual at all."

"Scampy," you murmur. Impulsively, you pull your shirt away from your chest and look down as if there were something hiding there. "But he *talked* to me! Don't tell me you've secretly invented a telepathic converter with band-pass filters!"

"Of course not. When the barrier was erected between you and Scampy, Scampy was conditioned to speak subvocally—that is, back in the throat and virtually without lip movement. You have a subminiature transmitter placed surgically in your pharynx. The button on your bulkhead activated it. There had to be a button, you see; we couldn't have the two of you speaking at the same time, which is what persons in the same room invariably do. You can't subvocalize *and* talk simultaneously. It would have tipped you off. Hence the button."

"I can't get used to it," you complain. "I can't! I practically *saw* the boy! Listen, Colonel—can I keep my built-in transmitter and have the same rig on my starship?"

He smiles, although you think it hurts his face. "You really want it left as is?"

"He's a good kid."

"Very well—Commander. Dismissed." He marches away.

You look after him, shaking your head. Then you duck into the space can. You stare at the bulkhead and at the button and at the scoring on the plate where you came *that* close to filling your cabin with your hydrazine supply. You shudder.

"Hey," you call softly. "Scamp!"

You push the button. You hear the carrier. Then, "I'm thirsty," says Scampy.

You cut out of there and go down to the rec area and into the short-order bar.

"A beer," you say. "And put a lump of vanilla ice cream in it. And two straws."

"You crazy?" asks the man.

"Nō," you say. "Oh, no!"

SENSE FROM THOUGHT DIVIDE

by
Mark Clifton

A million- (billion?-) dollar voyage to nowhere is high-priced psychotherapy. Mark Clifton, who spent twenty or so years in industrial engineering and personnel work before he turned to s-f writing, takes us back to the comparative miserliness of an ordinary cost-plus Gov't. contract, and the pragmatic psychology of a hard-working personnel director.

No problems, this time, about selling a new idea to a reluctant public; no theories or abstractions about souls, psyches, ids or egos. Just the practical business-world problem of getting people to do their jobs as efficiently as possible—in this case, persuading a cloak-and-turban-ed Swami to help get levitation onto the production line.

"Remembrance and reflection, how allied;
What thin partitions sense from thought divide."
Pope

WHEN I opened the door to my secretary's office, I could see her looking up from her desk at the Swami's face with an expression of fascinated skepticism. The Swami's back was toward me, and on it hung flowing folds of a black cloak. His turban was white, except where it had rubbed against the back of his neck.

"A tall, dark, and handsome man will soon come into your life," he was intoning in that sepulchral voice men

This story has been slightly revised from the original magazine version.

habitually use in their dealings with the absolute.

Sara's green eyes focused beyond him, on me, and began to twinkle.

"And there he is right now," she commented dryly. "Mr. Kennedy, Personnel Director for Computer Research."

The Swami whirled around, his heavy robe following the movement in a practiced swirl. His liquid black eyes looked me over shrewdly, and he bowed toward me as he vaguely touched his chest, lips and forehead. I expected him to murmur, "Effendi," or "Bwana Sahib," or something, but he must have felt silence was more impressive.

I acknowledged his greeting by pulling down one corner of my mouth. Then I looked at his companion.

The young lieutenant was standing very straight, very stiff, and a flush of pink was starting up from his collar and spreading around his clenched jaws to leave a semicircle of white in front of his red ears.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Lieutenant Murphy." He managed to open his teeth a bare quarter of an inch for the words to come out. "Pentagon!" His light gray eyes pierced me to see if I were impressed.

I wasn't.

"Division of Matériel and Supply," he continued in staccato, imitating a machine gun.

I waited. It was obvious he wasn't through yet. He hesitated, and I could see his Adam's apple travel up above the knot of his tie and back down again as he swallowed. The pink flush deepened into brilliant red.

"Poltergeist Section," he said defiantly.

"What?" The exclamation was out before I could catch it.

He tried to glare at me, but his eyes were pleading instead.

"General Sanfordwaithe said you'd understand." He intended to make it matter of fact in a sturdy, confident voice, but there was the undertone of a wail. It was time I lent a hand.

"You're West Point, aren't you?" I asked kindly.

He straightened still more. I hadn't believed it possible.

"Yes, sir!" He wanted to keep the gratitude out of his voice, but it was there. And for the first time, he had spoken the habitual term of respect to me.

"Well, what do you have here, Lieutenant Murphy?" I nodded toward the Swami who had been wavering between a proud, free stance and that of a drooping supplicant.

"According to my orders, sir," he said formally, "you have requested the Pentagon furnish you with one half dozen, six, male-type poltergeists. I am delivering the first of them to you, sir."

Sara's mouth, hanging wide open, reminded me to close my own.

So the Pentagon was calling my bluff. Well, maybe they did have something at that. I'd see.

"Float me over that ash tray there on the desk," I said casually to the Swami.

He looked at me as if I'd insulted him, and I could anticipate some reply to the effect that he was not applying for domestic service. But the humble supplicant rather than the proud and fierce hill man won. He started to pick up the ash tray from Sara's desk.

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "I didn't ask you to hand it to me. I want you to TK it over to me. What's the matter? Can't you even TK a simple ash tray?"

The lieutenant's eyes were getting bigger and bigger.

"Didn't your Poltergeist Section test this guy's aptitudes for telekinesis before you brought him from Washington all the way out here to Los Angeles?" I snapped at him.

The lieutenant's lips thinned to a bloodless line.

"I am certain he must have qualified adequately," he said stiffly, and this time left off the "sir."

"Well, I don't know," I answered doubtfully. "If he hasn't even enough telekinetic ability to float me an ash tray across the room—"

The Swami recovered himself first. He put the tips of his long fingers together in the shape of a swaybacked steeple,

and rolled his eyes upward.

"I am an instrument of infinite wisdom," he intoned. "Not a parlor magician."

"You mean that with all your infinite wisdom you can't do it," I accused flatly.

"The vibrations are not favorable—" he rolled the words sonorously.

"All right," I agreed. "We'll go somewhere else, where they're better!"

"The vibrations throughout all this crass, materialistic Western world—" he intoned.

"All right," I interrupted, "we'll go to India, then. Sara, call up and book tickets to Calcutta on the first possible plane!" Sara's mouth had been gradually closing, but it unhinged again.

"Perhaps not even India," the Swami murmured, hastily. "Perhaps Tibet."

"Now you know we can't get admission into Tibet while the Communists control it," I argued seriously. "But how about Nepal? That's a fair compromise. The Maharajah-dhiraja's friendly now. I'll settle for Nepal."

The Swami couldn't keep the triumphant glitter out of his eyes. He had me.

"I'm afraid it would have to be Tibet," he said positively. "Nowhere else in all this troubled world are the vibrations—"

"Oh go on back to Flatbush!" I interrupted disgustedly. "You know as well as I that you've never been outside New York before in your life. Your accent's as phony as the pear-shaped tones of a midwestern garden club president. Can't even TK a simple ash tray!"

I turned to the amazed lieutenant.

"Will you come into my office?" I asked him.

He looked over at the Swami, in doubt.

"He can wait out here," I said. "He won't run away. There isn't any subway, and he wouldn't know what to do. Anyway, if he did get lost, your Army Intelligence could find him. Give G-2 something to work on. Right through this door, lieutenant."

"Yes, sir," he said meekly, and preceded me into my office.

I closed the door behind us and waved him over to the crying chair. He folded at the knees and hips only, as if there were no hinges at all in the ramrod of his back. He sat up straight, on the edge of his chair, ready to spring into instant charge of battle. I went around back to my desk and sat down.

"Now, lieutenant," I said soothingly, "tell me all about it."

I could have sworn his square chin quivered at the note of sympathy in my voice. I wondered, irrelevantly, if the lads at West Point all slept with their faces confined in wooden frames to get that characteristically rectangular look.

"You knew I was from West Point," he said, and his voice held a note of awe. "And you knew, right away, that Swami was a phony from Flatbush."

"Come now," I said with a shrug. "Nothing to get mystical about. Patterns. Just patterns. Every environment leaves the stamp of its matrix on the individual shaped in it. It's a personnel man's trade to recognize the make of a person, just as you would recognize the make of a rifle."

"Yes, sir. I see, sir," he answered. But of course he didn't. And there wasn't much use to make him try. Most people cling too desperately to the ego-saving formula: Man cannot know man.

"Look, lieutenant," I said, getting down to business, "Have you been checked out on what this is all about?"

"Well, sir," he answered, as if he were answering a question in class, "I was cleared for top security, and told that a few months ago you and your Dr. Auerbach, here at Computer Research, discovered a way to create antigravity. I was told you claimed you had to have a poltergeist in the process. You told General Sanfordwaithe that you needed six of them, males. That's about all, sir. So the Poltergeist Division discovered the Swami, and I was assigned to bring him out here to you."

"Well then, Lieutenant Murphy, you go back to the Pentagon and tell General Sanfordwaithe that—" I could see by the look on his face that my message would probably not get through verbatim. "Never mind, I'll write it," I amended disgustedly. "And you can carry the message."

I punched Sara's button on my intercom.

"After all the exposure out there to the Swami," I said, "if you're still with us on this crass, materialistic plane, will you bring your book?"

"My astral self has been hovering over you, guarding you, every minute," Sara answered dreamily.

"Can it take shorthand?" I asked dryly.

"Maybe I'd better come in," she replied.

When she came through the door the lieutenant gave her one appreciative glance, then returned to his aloof pedestal of indifference. Obviously his pattern was to stand in majestic splendor and allow the girls to fawn somewhere down near his shoes. These lads with a glamour-boy complex almost always gravitate toward some occupation which will require them to wear a uniform. Sara catalogued him as quickly as I did, and seemed unimpressed. But you never can tell about a woman; the smartest of them will fall for the most transparent poses.

"General Sanfordwaithe, dear sir," I began, as she sat down at one corner of my desk and flipped open her book. "It takes more than a towel wrapped around the head and some mutterings about infinity to get poltergeist effects. So I am returning your phony Swami to you with my compliments—"

"Beg your pardon, sir," the lieutenant interrupted, and there was a certain note of suppressed triumph in his voice. "In case you rejected our applicant for the poltergeist job you have in mind, I was to hand you this." He undid a lovingly polished button of his tunic, slipped his hand beneath the cloth and pulled forth a long, sealed envelope.

I took it from him and noted the three sealing-wax imprints on the flap. From being carried so close to his heart for so long, the envelope was slightly less crisp than when he had received it. I slipped my letter opener in under the

side flap, and gently extracted the letter without, in any way, disturbing the wax seals which were to have guaranteed its privacy. There wasn't any point in my doing it, of course, except to demonstrate to the lieutenant that I considered the whole deal as a silly piece of cloak and dagger stuff.

After the general formalities, the letter was brief: "Dear Mr. Kennedy: We already know the Swami is a phony, but our people have been convinced that in spite of this there are some unaccountable effects. We have advised your general manager, Mr. Henry Grenoble, that we are in the act of carrying out our part of the agreement, namely, to provide you with six male-type poltergeists, and to both you and him we are respectfully suggesting that you get on with the business of putting the antigravity units into immediate production."

I folded the letter and tucked it into one side of my desk pad. I looked at Sara.

"Never mind the letter to General Sanfordwithe," I said. "He has successfully cut off my retreat in that direction." I looked over at the lieutenant. "All right," I said resignedly, "I'll apologize to the Swami, and make a try at using him."

I picked up the letter again and pretended to be reading it. But this was just a stall, because I had suddenly been struck by the thought that my extreme haste in scoring off the Swami and trying to get rid of him was because I didn't want to get involved again with poltergeists. Not any, of any nature.

Old Stone Face, our general manager, claimed to follow the philosophy of building men, not machines. To an extent he did. His favorite phrase was, "Don't ask me how. I hired you to tell me." He hired a man to do a job, and I will say for him, he left that man alone as long as the job got done. But when a man flubbed a job, and kept on flubbing it, then Mr. Henry Grenoble stepped in and carried out his own job—general managing.

He had given me the assignment of putting antigrav

units into production. He had given me access to all the money I would need for the purpose. He had given me sufficient time, months of it. And, in spite of all this coöperation, he still saw no production lines which spewed out antigrav units at some such rate as seventeen and five twelfths per second.

Apparently he got his communication from the Pentagon about the time I got mine. Apparently it contained some implication that Computer Research, under his management, was not pursuing the cause of manufacturing antigrav units with diligence and dispatch. Apparently he did not like this.

I had no more than apologized to the Swami, and received his martyred forgiveness, and arranged for a hotel suite for him and the lieutenant, when Old Stone Face sent for me. He began to manage with diligence and dispatch.

"Now you look here, Kennedy," he said forcefully, and his use of my last name, rather than my first, was a warning, "I've given you every chance. When you and Auerbach came up with that antigrav unit last fall, I didn't ask a lot of fool questions. I figured you knew what you were doing. But the whole winter has passed, and here it is spring, and you haven't done anything that I can see. I didn't say anything when you told General Sanfordwaithe that you'd have to have poltergeists to carry on the work, but I looked it up. First I thought you'd flipped your lid, then I thought you were sending us all on a wild goose chase so we'd leave you alone, then I didn't know what to think."

I nodded. He wasn't through.

"Now I think you're just pretending the whole thing doesn't exist because you don't want to fool with it."

I couldn't argue with that.

"For the first time, Kennedy, I'm asking you what happened?" he said firmly, but his tone was more telling than asking. So I was going to have to discuss frameworks with Old Stone Face, after all.

"Henry," I asked slowly, "have you kept up your reading in theoretical physics?"

He blinked at me. I couldn't tell whether it meant yes or no.

"When we went to school, you and I—" I hoped my putting us both in the same age group would tend to mollify him a little, "physics was all snug, secure, safe, definite. A fact was a fact, and that's all there was to it. But there's been some changes made. There's the coördinate systems of Einstein, where the relationships of facts can change from framework to framework. There's the application of multi-valued logic to physics where a fact becomes not a fact any longer. The astronomers talk about the expanding universe—it's a piker compared to man's expanding concepts about that universe."

He waited for more. His face seemed to indicate that I was beating around the bush.

"That all has a bearing on what happened," I assured him. "You have to understand what was behind the facts before you can understand the facts themselves. First, we weren't trying to make an antigrav unit at all. Dr. Auerbach was playing around with a chemical approach to cybernetics. He made up some goop which he thought would store memory impulses, the way the brain stores them. He brought a plastic cylinder of it over to me, so I could discuss it with you. I laid it on my desk while I went on with my personnel management business at hand."

Old Stone Face opened a humidor and took out a cigar. He lit it slowly and deliberately and looked at me sharply as he blew out the first puff of smoke.

"The nursery over in the plant had been having trouble with a little girl, daughter of one of our production women. She'd been throwing things, setting things on fire. The teachers didn't know how she did it, she just did it. They sent her to me. I asked her about it. She threw a tantrum, and when it was all over, Auerbach's plastic cylinder of goop was trying to fall upward, through the ceiling. That's what happened," I said.

He looked at his cigar, and looked at me. He waited for me to tie the facts to the theory. I hesitated, and then tried

to reassure myself. After all, we were in the business of manufacturing computers. The general manager ought to be able to understand something beyond primary arithmetic.

"Jennie Malasek was a peculiar child with a peculiar background," I went on. "Her mother was from the old country, a Slav. There's the inheritance of a lot of peculiar notions. Maybe she had passed them on to her daughter. She kept Jennie locked up in their room. The kid never got out with other children. Children, kept alone, never seeing anybody, get peculiar notions all by themselves. Who knows what kind of a coördinate system she built up, or how it worked? Her mother would come home at night and go about her tasks talking aloud, half to the daughter, half to herself. 'I really burned that foreman up, today,' she'd say. Or, 'Oh, boy, was he fired in a hurry!' Or, 'She got herself thrown out of the place,' things like that."

"So what does that mean, Ralph?" he asked. His switch to my first name was encouraging.

"To a child who never knew anything else," I answered, "one who had never learned to distinguish reality from unreality—as we would define it from our agreed framework—a special coördinate system might be built up where 'Everybody was up in the air at work, today,' might be taken literally. Under the old systems of physics that couldn't happen, of course—it says in the textbooks—but since it has been happening all through history, in thousands of instances, in the new systems of multivalued physics we recognize it. Under the old system, we already had all the major answers, we thought. Now that we've got our smug certainties knocked out of us, we're just fumbling along, trying to get some of the answers we thought we had.

"We couldn't make that cylinder activate others. We tried. We're still trying. In ordinary cybernetics you can have one machine punch a tape and it can be fed into another machine, but that means you first have to know how to code and decode a tape mechanically. We don't know how to code or decode a psi effect. We know the

Auerbach cylinder will store a psi impulse, but we don't know how. So we have to keep working with psi gifted people, at least until we've established some of the basic laws governing psi."

I couldn't tell by Henry's face whether I was with him or far far away. He told me he wanted to think about it, and made a little motion with his hand that I should leave the room.

I walked through the suite of executive offices and down a sound-rebuffing hallway. The throbbing clatter of manufacture of metallic parts made a welcome sound as I went through the far doorway into the factory. I saw a blueprint spread on a foreman's desk as I walked past. Good old blueprint. So many millimeters from here to there, made of such and such an alloy, a hole punched here with an allowance of five ten-thousandths plus or minus tolerance. Snug, secure, safe. I wondered if psi could ever be blueprinted. Or suppose you put a hole here, but when you looked away and then looked back it had moved, or wasn't there at all?

Quickly, I got myself into a conversation with a supervisor about the rising rate of employee turnover in his department. That was something also snug, secure, safe. All you had to do was figure out human beings.

I spent the rest of the morning on such pursuits, working with things I understood.

On his first rounds of the afternoon, the interoffice messenger brought me a memorandum from the general manager's office. I opened it with some misgivings.

Mr. Grenoble felt he should work with me more closely on the antigrav project. He understood, from his researches, that the most positive psi effects were experienced during a seance with a medium. Would I kindly arrange for the Swami to hold a seance that evening, after office hours, so that he might analyze the man's methods and procedures to see how they could fit smoothly into Company Operation. This was not to be construed as interference in the workings of my department but in the in-

terest of pursuing the entire matter with diligence and dispatch—

The seance was to be held in my office.

I had had many peculiar conferences in this room—from union leaders stripping off their coats, throwing them on the floor and stomping on them; to uplifters who wanted to ban cosmetics on our women employees so the male employees would not be tempted to think Questionable Thoughts. I could not recall ever having held a seance before.

My desk had been moved out of the way, over into one corner of the large room. A round table was brought over from the salesmen's report writing room (used there more for surreptitious poker playing than for writing reports) and placed in the middle of my office—on the grounds that it had no sharp corners to gouge people in their middles if it got to cavorting about recklessly. In an industrial plant one always has to consider the matter of safety rules and accident insurance rates.

In the middle of the table there rested, with dark fluid gleaming through clear plastic cases, six fresh cylinders which Auerbach had prepared in his laboratory over in the plant.

Auerbach had shown considerable unwillingness to attend the seance; he pleaded being extra busy with experiments just now, but I gave him that look which told him I knew he had just been stalling around the last few months, the same as I had.

If the psi effect had never come out in the first place, there wouldn't have been any mental conflict. He could have gone on with his processes of refining, simplifying and increasing the efficiency ratings of his goop. He would have settled gladly for a chemical compound which could have added two and two upon request; but when that compound can learn and demonstrate that there's no such thing as gravity, teaching it simple arithmetic is like ashes in the mouth.

I said as much to him. I stood there in his laboratory, leaned up against a work bench, and risked burning an

acid hole in the sleeve of my jacket just to put over an air of unconcern. He was perched on the edge of an opposite work bench, swinging his feet, and hiding the expression in his eyes behind the window's reflection upon his polished glasses. I said even more.

"You know," I said reflectively, "I'm completely unable to understand the attitude of supposedly unbiased men of science. Now you take all that mass of data about psi effects, the odd and unexplainable happenings, the premonitions, the specific predictions, the accurate descriptions of far away simultaneously happening events. You take that whole mountainous mass of data, evidence, phenomena—"

A slight turn of his head gave me a glimpse of his eyes behind the glasses. He looked as if he wished I'd change the subject. In his dry, undemonstrative way, I think he liked me. Or at least he liked me when I wasn't trying to make him think about things outside his safe and secure little framework. But I wasn't going to stop.

"Before Rhine came along, and brought all this down to the level of laboratory experimentation," I pursued, "how were those things to be explained? Say a fellow had some unusual powers, things that happened around him, things he knew without any explanation for knowing them. I'll tell you. There were two courses open to him. He could express it in the semantics of spiritism, or he could admit to witchcraft and sorcery. Take your pick; those were the only two systems of semantics available to him.

"We've got a third one now—parapsychology. If I had asked you to attend an experiment in parapsychology, you'd have agreed at once. But when I ask you to attend a seance, you balk! Man, what difference does it make what we call it? Isn't it up to us to investigate the evidence wherever we find it? No matter what kind of semantic debris it's hiding in?"

Auerbach shoved himself down off the bench, and pulled out a beat-up package of cigarettes.

"All right, Kennedy," he said resignedly, "I'll attend your seance."

The other invited guests were Sara, Lieutenant Murphy, Old Stone Face, myself, and, of course, the Swami. This was probably not typical of the Swami's usual audience composition.

Six chairs were placed at even intervals around the table. I had found soft white lights overhead to be most suitable for my occasional night work, but the Swami insisted that a blue light, a dim one, was most suitable for his night work.

I made no objection to that condition. One of the elementary basics of science is that laboratory conditions may be varied to meet the necessities of the experiment. If a red-lighted darkness is necessary to an operator's successful development of photographic film, then I could hardly object to a blue-lighted darkness for the development of the Swami's effects.

Neither could I object to the Swami's insistence that he sit with his back to the true North. When he came into the room, accompanied by Lieutenant Murphy, his thoughts seemed turned in upon himself, or wafted somewhere out of this world. He stopped in midstride, struck an attitude of listening, or feeling, perhaps, and slowly shifted his body back and forth.

"Ah," he said at last, in a tone of satisfaction, "there is the North!"

It was, but this was not particularly remarkable. There is no confusing maze of hallways leading to the Personnel Department from the outside. Applicants would be unable to find us if there were. If he had got his bearings out on the street, he could have managed to keep them.

He picked up the nearest chair with his own hands and shifted it so that it would be in tune with the magnetic lines of Earth. I couldn't object. The Chinese had insisted upon such placement of household articles, particularly their beds, long before the Earth's magnetism had been discovered by science. The birds had had their direction-finders attuned to it, long before there was man.

Instead of objecting, the lieutenant and I meekly picked up the table and shifted it to the new position. Sara and

Auerbach came in as we were setting the table down. Auerbach gave one quick look at the Swami in his black cloak and nearly white turban, and then looked away.

"Remember semantics," I murmured to him, as I pulled out Sara's chair for her. I seated her to the left of the Swami. I seated Auerbach to the right of him. If the lieutenant was, by chance, in cahoots with the Swami, I would foil them to the extent of not letting them sit side by side at least. I sat down at the opposite side of the table from the Swami. The lieutenant sat down between me and Sara.

The general manager came through the door at that instant, and took charge immediately.

"All right now," Old Stone Face said crisply, in his low, rumbling voice, "no fiddle faddling around. Let's get down to business."

The Swami closed his eyes.

"Please be seated," he intoned to Old Stone Face. "And now, let us all join hands in an unbroken circle."

Henry shot him a beetlebrowed look as he sat down between Auerbach and me, but at least he was coöperative to the extent that he placed both his hands on top of the table. If Auerbach and I reached for them, we would be permitted to grasp them.

I leaned back and snapped off the overhead light to darken the room in an eerie, blue glow.

We sat there, holding hands, for a full ten minutes. Nothing happened.

It was not difficult to estimate the pattern of Henry's mind. Six persons, ten minutes, equals one man-hour. One man-hour of idle time to be charged into the cost figure of the antigrav unit. He was staring fixedly at the cylinders which lay in random positions in the center of the table, as if to assess their progress at this processing point. He stirred restlessly in his chair, obviously dissatisfied with the efficiency rating of the manufacturing process.

The Swami seemed to sense the impatience, or it might have been coincidence.

"There is some difficulty," he gasped in a strangulated,

high voice. "My guides refuse to come through."

"Harrumph!" exclaimed Old Stone Face. It left no doubt about what *he* would do if *his* guides did not obey orders on the double.

"Someone in this circle is not a True Believer!" the Swami accused in an incredulous voice.

In the dim blue light I was able to catch a glimpse of Sara's face. She was on the verge of breaking apart. I managed to catch her eye and flash her a stern warning. Later she told me she had interpreted my expression as stark fear, but it served the same purpose. She smothered her laughter in a most unladylike sound somewhere between a snort and a squawk.

The Swami seemed to become aware that somehow he was not holding his audience spellbound.

"Wait!" he commanded urgently; then he announced in awe-stricken tones, "I feel a presence!"

There was a tentative, half-hearted rattle of some castanets—which could have been managed by the Swami wiggling one knee, if he happened to have them concealed there. This was followed by the thin squawk of a bugle—which could have been accomplished by sitting over toward one side and squashing the air out of a rubber bulb attached to a ten-cent party horn taped to his thigh.

Then there was nothing. Apparently his guides had made a tentative appearance and were, understandably, completely intimidated by Old Stone Face. We sat for another five minutes.

"Harrumph!" Henry cleared his throat again, this time louder and more commanding.

"That is all," the Swami said in a faint, exhausted voice. "I have returned to you on your material plane."

The handholding broke up in the way bits of metal, suddenly charged positive and negative, would fly apart. I leaned back again and snapped on the white lights. We all sat there a few seconds, blinking in what seemed a sudden glare.

The Swami sat with his chin dropped down to his chest.

Then he raised stricken, liquid eyes.

"Oh, now I remember where I am," he said. "What happened? I never know."

Old Stone Face threw him a look of withering scorn. He picked up one of the cylinders and hefted it in the palm of his hand. It did not fly upward to bang against the ceiling. It weighed about what it ought to weigh. He tossed the cylinder, contemptuously, back into the pile, scattering them over the table. He pushed back his chair, got to his feet, and stalked out of the room without looking at any of us.

The Swami made a determined effort to recapture the spotlight.

"I'm afraid I must have help to walk to the car," he whispered. "I am completely exhausted. Ah, this work takes so much out of me. Why do I go on with it? Why? Why? Why?"

He drooped in his chair, and made a valiantly brave effort to rise under his own power when he felt the lieutenant's hands lifting him up. He was leaning heavily on the lieutenant as they went out the door.

Sara looked at me dubiously.

"Will there be anything else?" she asked. Her tone suggested that since nothing had been accomplished, perhaps we should get some work out before she left.

"No, Sara," I answered. "Good night. See you in the morning."

She nodded and went out the door.

Apparently none of them had seen what I saw. I wondered if Auerbach had. He was a trained observer. He was standing beside the table looking down at the cylinders. He reached over and poked at one of them with his forefinger. He was pushing it back and forth. It gave him no resistance beyond normal inertia. He pushed it a little farther out of parallel with true North. It did not try to swing back.

So he had seen it. When I'd laid the cylinders down on the table they were in random positions. During the seance there had been no jarring of the table, not even so much

as a rap or quiver which could have been caused by the Swami's lifted knee. When we'd shifted the table, after the Swami had changed his chair, the cylinders hadn't been disturbed. When Old Stone Face had been staring at them during the seance—seance?, hah!—they were lying in inert, random positions.

But when the lights came back on, and just before Henry had picked one up and tossed it back to scatter them, every cylinder had been laid in orderly parallel—and with one end pointing to true North!

I stood there beside Auerbach, and we both poked at the cylinders some more. They gave us no resistance, nor showed that they had any ideas about it one way or the other.

"It's like so many things," I said morosely. "If you do just happen to notice anything out of the ordinary at all, it doesn't seem to mean anything."

"Maybe that's because you're judging it outside of its own framework," Auerbach answered. I couldn't tell whether he was being sarcastic or speculative. "What I don't understand," he went on, "is that once the cylinders having been activated by whatever force there was in action—all right, call it psi—well, why didn't they retain it, the way the other cylinders retained the antigrav force?"

I thought for a moment. Something about the conditional setup seemed to give me an idea.

"You take a photographic plate," I reasoned. "Give it a weak exposure to light, then give it a strong blast of over-exposure. The first exposure is going to be blanked out by the second. Old Stone Face was feeling pretty strongly toward the whole matter."

Auerbach looked at me, unbelieving.

"There isn't any rule about who can have psi talent," I argued. "I'm just wondering if I shouldn't wire General Sanfordwaithe and tell him to cut our order for polter-geists down to five."

I spent a glum, restless night. I knew, with certainty, that Old Stone Face was going to give me trouble. I didn't

need any psi talent for that; it was an inevitable part of his pattern. He had made up his mind to take charge of this antigrav operation, and he wouldn't let one bogus seance stop him more than momentarily.

If it weren't so close to direct interference with my department, I'd have been delighted to sit on the side lines and watch him try to command psi effects to happen. That would be like commanding some random copper wire and metallic cores to start generating electricity.

For once I could have overlooked the interference with my department if I didn't know, from past experience, that I'd be blamed for the consequent failure. And there was something else, too; I had the feeling that if I were allowed to go along, carefully and experimentally, I just might discover a few of the laws about psi. There was the tantalizing feeling that I was on the verge of knowing at least something.

The Pentagon people had been right. The Swami was an obvious phony of the baldest fakery, yet he had something. He had something, but how was I to get hold of it? Just what kind of turns with what around what did you make to generate a psi force? It took two thousand years for man to move from the concept that amber was a stone with a soul to the concept of static electricity. Was there any chance I could find some shortcuts in reducing the laws governing psi? The one bright spot of my morning was that Auerbach hadn't denied seeing the evidence of the cylinders pointing North.

It turned out to be the only bright spot. I had no more than got to my office and sorted out the routine urgencies from those which had to be handled immediately, when Sara announced the lieutenant and the Swami. I put everything else off, and told her to send them right in.

The Swami was in an incoherent rage. The lieutenant was contracting his eyebrows in a scowl and clenching his fists in frustration. In a voice, soaring into the falsetto, the Swami demanded that he be sent back to Brooklyn where he was appreciated. The lieutenant had orders to stay with the Swami, but he didn't have any orders about returning

either to Brooklyn or the Pentagon. I managed, at last, to get the lieutenant seated in a straight chair, but the Swami couldn't stay still long enough. He stalked up and down the room, swirling his slightly odorous black cloak on the turns. Gradually the story came out.

Old Stone Face, a strong advocate of Do It Now, hadn't wasted any time. From his home he had called the Swami at his hotel and commanded him to report to the general manager's office at once. They all got there about the same time, and Henry had waded right in.

Apparently Henry, too, had spent a restless night. He accused the Swami of inefficiency, bungling, fraud, deliberate insubordination, and a few other assorted faults for having made a fool out of us all at the seance. He'd as much as commanded the Swami to cut out all the shilly-shallying and get down to the business of activating anti-grav cylinders, or else. He hadn't been specific about what the "or else" would entail.

"Now I'm sure he really didn't mean—" I began to pour oil on the troubled waters. "With your deep insight, Swami— The fate of great martyrs throughout the ages—" Gradually the ego-building phrases calmed him down. He grew willing to listen, if for no more than the anticipation of hearing more of them.

He settled down into the crying chair at last, his valence shifting from outraged anger to a vast and noble forgiveness. This much was not difficult. To get him to cooperate, consciously and enthusiastically, might not be so easy.

Each trade has its own special techniques. The analytical chemist has a series of routines he tries when he wishes to reduce an unknown compound to its constituents. To the chemically uneducated, this may appear to be a fumbling, hit or miss, kind of procedure. The personnel man, too, has his series of techniques, which may appear to be no more than random, pointless conversation.

I first tried the routine process of reasoning. I didn't expect it to work; it seldom does, but it can't be eliminated until it has been tested.

"You must understand," I said slowly, soothingly, "that our intentions are constructive. We are simply trying to apply the scientific method to something which has, heretofore, been wrapped in mysticism."

The shocked freezing of his facial muscles gave me the answer to that.

"Science understands nothing, nothing at all!" he snapped. "Science tries to reduce everything to test tubes and formulae; but I am the instrument of a mystery which man can never know."

"Well, now," I said reasonably. "Let us not be inconsistent. You say this is something man was not meant to know; yet you, yourself, have devoted your life to gaining a greater comprehension of it."

"I seek only to rise above my material self so that I might place myself in harmony with the flowing symphony of Absolute Truth," he lectured me sonorously. The terminology didn't bother me; the jargon of the sciences sometimes grows just as esoteric. Maybe it even meant something.

One thing I was sure it meant. There are two basic approaches to the meaning of life and the universe about us. Man can know: That is the approach of science, its whole meaning. There are mysteries which man was not meant to know: That is the other approach. There is no reconciling of the two on a reasoning basis. I represented the former. I wasn't sure the Swami was a true representative of the latter, but at least he had picked up the valence and the phrases.

I made a mental note that reasoning was an unworkable technique with this compound. Henry, a past master at it, had already tried threats and abuse. That hadn't worked. I next tried one of the oldest forms in the teaching of man, a parable.

I told him of my old Aunt Dimity, who was passionately fond of Rummy, but considered all other card games sinful.

"Ah, how well she proves my point," the Swami countered. "There is an inner voice, a wisdom greater than

the mortal mind to guide us—"

"Well now," I asked reasonably, "why would the inner voice say that Rummy was O.K., but Casino wasn't?" But it was obvious he liked the point he had made better than he had liked the one I failed to make.

So I tried the next technique. Often an opponent will come over to your side if you just confess, honestly, that he is a better man than you are, and you need his help. What was the road I must take to achieve the same understanding he had? His eyes glittered at that.

"First there is fasting, and breathing, and contemplating self," he murmured mendaciously. "I would be unable to aid you until you gave me full ascendancy over you, so that I might guide your every thought—"

I decided to try inspiration.

"Do you realize, Swami," I asked, "that the one great drawback throughout the ages to a full acceptance of psi is the lack of permanent evidence? It has always been evanescent, perishable. It always rests solely upon the word of witnesses. But if I could show you a film print, then you could not doubt the existence of photography, could you?"

I opened my lower desk drawer and pulled out a couple of the Auerbach cylinders which we had used the night before. I laid them on top of the desk.

"These cylinders," I said, "act like the photographic film. They will record, in permanent form, the psi effects you command. At last, for all mankind the doubt will be stilled; man will at once know the truth; and you will take your place among the immortals."

I thought it was pretty good. It should have done the trick. But the Swami was staring at the cylinders first in fascination, then fear, then in horror. He jumped to his feet, without bothering to swirl his robe majestically, rushed over to the door, fumbled with the knob as if he were in a burning room, managed to get the door open, and rushed outside. The lieutenant gave me a puzzled look, and went after him.

I drew a deep breath, and exhaled it audibly. My testing

procedures hadn't produced the results I'd expected, but the last one had revealed something else—or rather, had confirmed two things we knew already.

One: The Swami believed himself to be a fraud.

Two: He wasn't.

Both cylinders were pointing toward the door. I watched them, at first not quite sure; like the Swami, I'd have preferred not to believe the evidence. But the change in their perspective with the angles of the desk made the motion unmistakable.

Almost as slowly as the minute hand of a watch, they were creeping across the desk toward the door. They, too, were trying to escape from the room.

I nudged them with my fingers. They hustled along a little faster, as if appreciative of the help, even coming from me. I saw they were moving faster, as if they were learning as they tried it. I turned one of them around. Slowly it turned back and headed for the door again. I lifted one of them down to the floor. It had no tendency to float, but it kept heading for the door. The other one fell off the desk while I was fooling with the first one. The jar didn't seem to bother it any. It, too, began to creep across the rug toward the door.

I opened the door for them. Sara looked up. She saw the two cylinders come into view, moving under their own power.

"Here we go again," she said, resignedly.

The two cylinders pushed themselves over the door sill, got clear outside my office. Then they went inert. Both Sara and I tried nudging them, poking them. They just lay there; mission accomplished. I carried them back inside my office and lay them on the floor. Immediately both of them began to head for the door again.

"Simple," Sara said dryly, "they just can't stand to be in the same room with you, that's all."

"You're not just whistling, gal," I answered. "That's the whole point."

"Have I said something clever?" she asked seriously.

I took the cylinders back into my office and put them in

a desk drawer. I watched the desk for a while, but it didn't change position. Apparently it was too heavy for the weak force activating the cylinders.

I picked up the phone and called Old Stone Face. I told him about the cylinders.

"There!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "I knew all that fellow needed was a good old-fashioned talking to. Some day, my boy, you'll realize that you still have a lot to learn about handling men."

"Yes, sir," I answered.

At that, Old Stone Face had a point. If he hadn't got in and riled things up, maybe the Swami would not have been emotionally upset enough to generate the psi force which had activated these new cylinders.

Did that mean that psi was linked with emotional upheaval? Well, maybe. Not necessarily, but Rhine had proved that strength of desire had an effect upon the frequency index of telekinesis.

Was there anything at all we knew about psi, so that we could start cataloguing, sketching in the beginnings of a pattern? Yes, of course there was.

First, it existed. No one could dismiss the mountainous mass of evidence unless he just refused to think about the subject.

Second, we could, in time, know what it was and how it worked. You'd have to give up the entire basis of scientific attitude if you didn't admit that.

Third, it acted like a sense, rather than as something dependent upon the intellectual process of thought. You could, for example—I argued to my imaginary listener—command your nose to smell a rose, and by autosuggestion you might think you were succeeding; that is, until you really did smell a real rose, then you'd know that you'd failed to create it through a thought pattern. The sense would have to be separated from the process of thinking about the sense.

So what was psi? But, at this point, did it matter much? Wasn't the main issue one of learning how to produce it, use it? How long did we work with electricity and get a

lot of benefits from it before we formed some theories about what it was? And, for that matter, did we know what it was, even yet? "A flow of electrons" was a pretty meaningless phrase, when you stopped to think about it. I could say psi was a flow of psitrons, and it would mean as much.

I reached over and picked up a cigarette. I started fumbling around in the center drawer of my desk for a matchbook. I didn't find any. Without thinking, I opened the drawer containing the two cylinders. They were pressing up against the side of the desk drawer, still trying to get out of the room. Single purposed little beasts, weren't they?

I closed the drawer, and noticed that I was crushing out my cigarette in the ash tray, just as if I'd smoked it. My nerves weren't all they should be this morning.

Which brought up the fourth point, and also took me right back to where I started.

Nerves . . .

Emotional upheavals.

Rhine's correlations between interest, belief, and ability to perform . . .

It seemed very likely that a medium such as the Swami, whose basic belief was There Are Mysteries, would be unable to function in a framework where the obvious intent was to unveil those mysteries!

That brought up a couple more points. I felt pretty sure of them. I felt as if I were really getting somewhere. And I had a situation which was ideal for proving my points.

I flipped the intercom key, and spoke to Sara.

"Will you arrange with her foreman for Annie Malasek to come to my office right now?" I asked. Sara is flippant when things are going along all right, but she knows when to buckle down and do what she's asked. She gave me no personal reactions to this request.

Yes, Annie Malesek would be a good one. If anybody in the plant believed There Are Mysteries, it would be Annie. Further, she was exaggeratedly loyal to me. She believed I was responsible for turning her little Jennie, the little girl who'd started all this poltergeist trouble, into a Good

Little Girl. In this instance, I had no qualms about taking advantage of that loyalty.

While I waited for her I called the lieutenant at his hotel. He was in. Yes, the Swami was also in. They'd just returned. Yes, the Swami was ranting and raving about leaving Los Angeles at once. He had said he absolutely would have nothing more to do with us here at Computer Research. I told Lieutenant Murphy to scare him with tales of the secret, underground working of Army Intelligence, to quiet him down. And I scared the lieutenant a little by pointing out that holding a civilian against his will without the proper writ was tantamount to kidnaping. So if the Army didn't want trouble with the Civil Courts, all brought about because the lieutenant didn't know how to handle his man—

The lieutenant became immediately anxious to cooperate with me. So then I soothed him. I told him that, naturally, the Swami was unhappy. He was used to Swami-ing, and out here he had been stifled, frustrated. What he needed was some credulous women to catch their breath at his awe-inspiring insight and gaze with fearful rapture into his eyes. The lieutenant didn't know where he could find any women like that. I told him, dryly, that I would furnish some.

Annie was more than cooperative. Sure, the whole plant was buzzing about that foreign-looking Swami who had been seen coming in and out of my office. Sure, a lot of the Girls believed in seances.

"Why? Don't you, Mr. Kennedy?" she asked curiously.

I said I wasn't sure, and she clucked her tongue in sympathy. It must be terrible not to be sure, so well, it must be just terrible. And I was such a kind man, too . . .

But when I asked her to go to the hotel and persuade the Swami to give her a reading, she was reluctant. I thought my plan was going to be frustrated, but it turned out that her reluctance was only because she did not have a thing to wear, going into a high-toned place like that.

Sara wasn't the right size, but one of the older girls in

the outer office would lend Annie some clothes if I would let her go see the Swami, too. It developed that her own teacher was a guest of Los Angeles County for a while, purely on a trumped-up charge, you understand, Mr. Kennedy. Not that she was a cop hater or anything like that. She was perfectly aware of what a fine and splendid job those noble boys in blue did for us all, but—

In my own office! Well, you never knew.

Yet, what was the difference between her and me? We were both trying to get hold of and benefit by psi effects, weren't we?

And the important thing was that we could combine our efforts to our mutual advantage. My interviewer's teacher had quite a large following, and now they were all at loose ends. If the Swami were willing, she could provide a large and ready-made audience for him. She would be glad to talk to him about it.

Annie hurriedly said that she would be glad to talk to him about it, too; that she could get up a large audience, too. So, even before it got started, I had my rival factions at work. I egged them both on, and promised that I'd get Army Intelligence to work with the local boys in blue to hold off making any raids.

Annie told me again what a kind man I was. My interviewer spoke up quickly and said how glad she was to find an opportunity for expressing how grateful she was for the privilege of working right in the same department with such an understanding, really intellectually developed adult. She eyed Annie sidelong, as if to gauge the effects of her attempts to set me up on a pedestal, out of Annie's reach.

I hoped I wouldn't start believing either one of them. I hoped I wasn't as inaccurate in my estimates of people as was my interviewer. I wondered if she were really qualified for the job she held. Then I realized this was a contest between two women and I, a mere male, was simply being used as the pawn. Well, that worked both ways. In a fair bargain both sides receive satisfaction. I felt a little easier about my tactical maneuvers.

But the development of rivalry between factions of the audience gave me an additional idea. Perhaps that's what the Swami really needed, a little rivalry. Perhaps he was being a little too hard to crack because he knew he was the only egg in the basket.

I called Old Stone Face and told him what I planned. He responded that it was up to me. He'd stepped in and got things under way for me, got things going, now it was my job to keep them going. It looked as if he were edging out from under—or maybe he really believed that.

Before I settled into the day's regular routine, I wired General Sanfordwithe, and told him that if he had any more prospects ready would he please ship me one at once, via air mail, special delivery.

The recital hall, hired for the Swami's Los Angeles debut, was large enough to accommodate all the family friends and relatives of any little Maribel who, having mastered "Daffodils In May," for four fingers, was being given to the World. It had the usual small stage equipped with pull-back curtains to give a dramatic flourish, or to shut off from view the effects of any sudden nervous catastrophe brought about by stage fright.

I got there, purposely a little late, in hopes the house lights would already be dimmed and everything in progress; but about a hundred and fifty people were milling around outside on the walk and in the corridors. Both factions had really been busy.

Most of them were women, but, to my intense relief, there were a few men. Some of these were only husbands, but a few of the men wore a look which said they'd been far away for a long time. Somehow I got the impression that instead of looking into a crystal ball, they would be more inclined to look out of one.

It was a little disconcerting to realize that no one noticed me, or seemed to think I was any different from anybody else. I supposed I should be thankful that I wasn't attracting any attention. I saw my interviewer amid a group of Older Girls. She winked at me roguishly, and patted her

heavy handbag significantly. As per instructions, she was carrying a couple of the Auerbach cylinders.

I found myself staring in perplexity for a full minute at another woman, before I realized it was Annie. I had never seen her before, except dressed in factory blue jeans, man's blue shirt, and a bandanna wrapped around her head. Her companion, probably another of the factory assemblers, nudged her and pointed, not too subtly, in my direction. Annie saw me then, and lit up with a big smile. She started toward me, hesitated when I frowned and shook my head, flushed with the thought that I didn't want to speak to her in public; then got a flash of better sense than that. She, too, gave me a conspiratorial wink and patted her handbag.

My confederates were doing nicely.

Almost immediately thereafter a horsefaced, mustached old gal started rounding people up in a honey sweet, pear shaped voice; and herded them into the auditorium. I chose one of the wooden folding chairs in the back row.

A heavy jowled old gal came out in front of the closed curtains and gave a little introductory talk about how lucky we all were that the Swami had consented to visit with us. There was the usual warning to anyone who was not of the esoteric that we must not expect too much, that sometimes nothing at all happened, that true believers did not attend just to see effects. She reminded us kittenishly that the guides were capricious, and that we must all help by merging ourselves in the great flowing currents of absolute infinity.

She finally faltered, realized she was probably saying all the things the Swami would want to say—in the manner of people who introduce speakers everywhere—and with a girlish little flourish she waved at someone off stage.

The house lights dimmed. The curtains swirled up and back.

The Swami was doing all right for himself. He was seated behind a small table in the center of the stage. A pale violet light diffused through a huge crystal ball on

the table, and threw his dark features into sharp relief. It gave an astonishingly remote and inscrutable wisdom to his features. In the pale light, and at this distance, his turban looked quite clean.

He began to speak slowly and sonorously. A hush settled over the audience, and gradually I felt myself merging with the mass reaction of the rest. As I listened, I got the feeling that what he was saying was of tremendous importance, that somehow his words contained great and revealing wonders—or would contain them if I were only sufficiently advanced to comprehend their true meanings. The man was good, he knew his trade. All men search for truth at one level or another. I began to realize why such a proportionate few choose the cold and impersonal laboratory. Perhaps if there were a way to put science to music—

The Swami talked on for about twenty minutes, and then I noticed his voice had grown deeper and deeper in tone, and suddenly, without any apparent transition, we all knew it was not really the Swami's voice we were hearing. And then he began to tell members of the audience little intimate things about themselves, things which only they should know.

He was good at this, too. He had mastered the trick of making universals sound like specifics. I could do the same thing. The patterns of people's lives have multiple similarities. To a far greater extent than generally realized the same things happen to everyone. The idea was to take some of the lesser known ones and word them so they seemed to apply to one isolated individual.

For instance, I could tell a fellow about when he was a little boy there was a little girl in a red dress with blond pigtailed who used to scrap with him and tattle things about him to her mother. If he were inclined to be credulous, this was second sight I had. But it is a universal. What average boy didn't, at one time or another, know a little girl with blond pigtailed? What blond little girl didn't occasionally wear a red dress? What little girl didn't tattle to her mother about the naughty things the boys were doing?

The Swami did that for a while. The audience was

leaning forward in a rapture of ecstasy. First the organ tones of his voice soothed and softened. The phrases which should mean something if only you had the comprehension. The universals applied as specifics. He had his audience in the palm of his hand. He didn't need his crystal ball to tell him that.

But he wanted it to be complete. Most of the responses had been from women. He gave them the generalities which didn't sound like generalities. They confirmed with specifics. But most were women. He wanted the men, too. He began to concentrate on the men. He made it easy.

"I have a message," he said. "From . . . now let me get it right . . . from R. S. It is for a man in this audience. Will the man who knew R. S. acknowledge?"

There was a silence. And that was such an easy one, too. I hadn't planned to participate, but, on impulse, since none of the other men were cooperating, I spoke up.

"Robert Smith!" I exclaimed. "Good old Bob!"

Several of the women sitting near me looked at me and beamed their approval. One of the husbands scowled at me.

"I can tell by your tone," the Swami said, and apparently he hadn't recognized my tone, "that you have forgiven him. That is the message. He wants you to know that he is happy. He is much wiser now. He knows now that he was wrong."

One of the women reached over and patted me on the shoulder.

But the Swami had no more messages for men. He was smart enough to know where to stop. He'd tried one of the simplest come-ons, and there had been too much of a pause. It had almost not come off.

I wondered who good old Bob Smith was? Surely, among the thousands of applicants I'd interviewed, there must have been a number of them. And, being applicants, of course some of them had been wrong.

The Swami's tones, giving one message after another—faster and faster now, not waiting for acknowledgment or confirmation—began to sink into a whisper. His speech

became ragged, heavy. The words became indistinguishable. About his head there began to float a pale, luminescent sphere. There was a subdued gasp from the audience and then complete stillness. As though, unbreathing, in the depths of a tomb, they watched the sphere. It bobbed about, over the Swami's head and around him. At times it seemed as if about to float off stage, but it came back. It swirled out over the audience, but not too far, and never at such an angle that the long, flexible dull black wire supporting it would be silhouetted against the glowing crystal ball.

Then it happened. There was a gasp, a smothered scream. And over at one side of the auditorium a dark object began bobbing about in the air up near the ceiling. It swerved and swooped. The Swami's luminescent sphere jerked to a sudden stop. The Swami sat with open mouth and stared at the dark object which he was not controlling.

The dark object was not confined to any dull black wire. It went where it willed. It went too high and brushed against the ceiling.

There was a sudden shower of coins to the floor. A compact hit the floor with a flat spat. A handkerchief floated down more slowly.

"My purse!" a woman gasped. I recognized my interviewer's voice. Her purse contained two Auerbach cylinders, and they were having themselves a ball.

In alarm, I looked quickly at the stage, hoping the Swami wasn't astute enough to catch on. But he was gone. The audience, watching the bobbing purse, hadn't realized it as yet. And they were delayed in realizing it by a diversion from the other side of the auditorium.

"I can't hold it down any longer, Mr. Kennedy!" a woman gasped out. "It's taking me up into the air!"

"Hold on, Annie!" I shouted back. "I'm coming!"

A chastened and subdued Swami sat in my office the following morning, and this time he was inclined to be cooperative. More, he was looking to me for guidance, understanding, and didn't mind acknowledging my ascendancy.

And, with the lieutenant left in the outer office, he didn't have any face to preserve.

Later, last night, he'd learned the truth of what happened after he had run away in a panic. I'd left a call at the hotel for the lieutenant. When the lieutenant had got him calmed down and returned my call, I'd instructed him to tell the Swami about the Auerbach cylinders; to tell the Swami he was not a fake after all.

The Swami had obviously spent a sleepless night. It is a terrible thing to have spent years perfecting the art of fakery, and then to realize you needn't have faked at all. More terrible, he had swallowed some of his own medicine, and all through the night he had shivered in fear of some instant and horrible retaliation. For him it was still a case of *There Are Mysteries*. •

And it was of no comfort to his state of mind right now that the four cylinders we had finally captured last night were, at this moment, bobbing about in my office, swooping and swerving around in the upper part of the room, like bats trying to find some opening. I was giving him the full treatment. The first two cylinders, down on the floor, were pressing up against my closed door, like frightened little things trying to escape a room of horror.

The Swami's face was twitching, and his long fingers kept twining themselves into King's X symbols. But he was sitting it out. He was swallowing some of the hair of the dog that bit him. I had to give him A for that.

"I've been trying to build up a concept of the framework wherein psi seems to function," I told him casually, just as if it were all a formularized laboratory procedure. "I had to pull last night's stunt to prove something."

He tore his eyes away from the cylinders which were over exploring one corner of the ceiling, and looked at me.

"Let's go to electricity," I said speculatively. "Not that we know psi and electricity have anything in common, other than some similar analogies, but we don't know they don't. Both of them may be just different manifestations of the same thing. We don't really know why a magnetized core, turning inside a coil of copper wire, generates elec-

tricity.

"Oh we've got some phrases," I acknowledged. "We've got a whole structure of phrases, and when you listen to them they sound as if they ought to mean something—like the phrases you were using last night. Everybody assumes they do mean something to the pundits. So, since it is human to want to be a pundit, we repeat these phrases over and over, and call them explanations. Yet we do know what happens, even if we do just theorize about why. We know how to wrap something around something and get electricity.

"Take the induction coil," I said. "We feed a low-voltage current into one end, and we draw off a high-voltage current from the other. But anyone who wants, any time, can disprove the whole principle of the induction coil. All you have to do is wrap your core with a nonconductor, say nylon thread, and presto, nothing comes out. You see, it doesn't work; and anybody who claims it does is a faker and a liar. That's what happens when science tries to investigate psi by the standard methods.

"You surround a psi-gifted individual with nonbelievers, and probably nothing will come out of it. Surround him with true believers; and it all seems to act like an induction coil. Things happen. Yet even when things do happen, it is usually impossible to prove it.

"Take yourself, Swami. And this is significant. First we have the north point effect. Then those two little beggars trying to get out the door. Then the ones which are bobbing around up there. Without the cylinders there would have been no way to know that anything had happened at all.

"Now, about this psi framework. It isn't something you can turn on and off, at will. We don't know enough yet for that. Aside from some believers and those individuals who do seem to attract psi forces, we don't know, yet, what to wrap around what. So, here's what you're to do: You're to keep a supply of these cylinders near you at all times. If any psi effects happen, they'll record it. Fair enough?

"Now," I said with finality. "I have anticipated that

you might refuse. But you're not the only person who has psi ability. I've wired General Sanfordwaithe to send me another fellow; one who will cooperate."

The Swami thought it over. Here he was with a suite in a good hotel; with an army lieutenant to look after his earthly needs; on the payroll of a respectable company; with a ready-made flock of believers; and no fear of the bunco squad. He had never had it so good. The side money, for private readings alone, should be substantial.

Further, and he watched me narrowly, I didn't seem to be afraid of the cylinders.

"I'll cooperate," he said.

For three days there was nothing. The Swami called me a couple times a day and reported that the cylinders just lay around his room. I didn't know what to tell him. I recommended he read biographies of famous mediums. I recommended fasting, and breathing, and contemplating self. He seemed dubious, but said he'd try it.

On the morning of the third day, Sara called me on the intercom and told me there was another Army lieutenant in her office, and another . . . gentleman. I opened my door and went out to Sara's office to greet them.

The new lieutenant was no more than the standard output from the same production line as Lieutenant Murphy, but the wizened little old man he had in tow was from a different and much rarer matrix. As fast as I had moved, I was none too soon. The character reached over and tilted up Sara's chin as I was coming through the door.

"Now you're a healthy young wench," he said with a leer. "What are you doing tonight, baby?" The guy was at least eighty years old.

"Hey, you, pop!" I exclaimed in anger. "Be your age!"

He turned around and looked me up and down.

"I'm younger, that way, than you are, right now!" he snapped.

A disturbance in the outer office kept me from thinking up a retort. There were some subdued screams, some scuf-

fling of heavy shoes, the sounds of some running feet as applicants got away. The outer door to Sara's office was flung open.

Framed in the doorway, breast high, floated the Swami!

He was sitting, cross-legged, on a hotel bathmat. From both front corners, where they had been attached by loops of twine, there peeked Auerbach cylinders. Two more rear cylinders were grasped in Lieutenant Murphy's strong hands. He was propelling the Swami along, mid air, in Atlantic City Boardwalk style.

The Swami looked down at us with aloof disdain, then his eyes focused on the old man. His glance wavered; he threw a startled and fearful look at the cylinders holding up his bathmat. They did not fall. A vast relief overspread his face, and he drew himself erect with more disdain than ever. The old man was not so aloof.

"Harry Glotzl!" he exclaimed. "Why you . . . you faker! What are you doing in that getup?"

The Swami took a casual turn about the room, leaning to one side on his magic carpet as if banking an airplane.

"Peasant!" He spat the word out and motioned grandly toward the door. Lieutenant Murphy pushed him through.

"Why, that no good bum!" the old man shouted at me. "That no-good from nowhere! I'll fix him! Thinks he's something, does he? I'll show him! Anything he can do I can do better!"

His rage got the better of him. He rushed through the door, shaking both fists above his white head, shouting imprecations, threats, and pleading to be shown how the trick was done, all in the same breath. The new lieutenant cast a stricken look at us and then sped after his charge.

"Looks as if we're finally in production," I said to Sara.

"That's only the second one," she said mournfully. "When you get all six of them, this joint's sure going to be jumping!"

I looked out of her window at the steel and concrete walls of the factory. They were solid, real, secure; they

were a symbol of reality, the old reality a man could understand.

"I hope you don't mean that literally, Sara," I answered dubiously.

POTTAGE

by

Zenna Henderson

However far-fetched telekinesis or anti-gravity, or both, may be to you or me, Clifton's story has the real feeling of personal experience. He was a personnel man; and he has also, as a long-time resident of Southern California, made an extensive personal study of virtually every kind of claim for psi, from crackpot cults and mystic fakes to the serious investigations in parapsychology now being conducted in several universities.

Miss Henderson, likewise, writes of what she knows. She is a schoolteacher, currently working in Europe for the U. S. Army. As for her "People," and their special powers and problems: I have read everything she has written about them—and they seem a great deal more real to me than, for instance, Eskimos or Equatorial Pygmies. (This is the third or fourth story in the "People" series. A book-length collection is now being prepared for publication—soon, I hope.)

YOU GET TIRED of teaching after a while. Well, maybe not of teaching itself because it's insidious and remains a tug in the blood for all of your life, but there comes a day when you look down at the paper you're grading or listen to an answer you're giving a child and you get a *boinnng!* feeling. And each reverberation of the *boing* is a year in your life, another set of children through your hands, another beat in monotony and it's frightening. The value of the work you're doing doesn't enter into it at that moment and the monotony is bitter on your tongue.

Sometimes you can assuage that feeling by consciously savoring those precious days of pseudo-freedom between the time you receive your contract for the next year and the moment you sign it. Because you *can* escape at that moment, but somehow—you don't.

But I did, one Spring. I quit teaching. I didn't sign up again. I went chasing after—after what? Maybe excitement—maybe a dream of wonder—maybe a new, bright, wonderful world that just *must* be somewhere else because it isn't here-and-now. Maybe a place to begin again so I'd never end up at the same frightening emotional dead end. So I quit.

But by late August the emptiness inside me was bigger than boredom, bigger than monotony, bigger than lusting after freedom. It was almost terror to have September nearly here and not care that in a few weeks school starts—tomorrow school starts—First Day of School. So, almost at the last minute, I went to the Placement Bureau. Of course it was too late to try to return to my other school, and besides, the mold of the years there still chafed in too many places.

"Well," said the Placement Director as he shuffled his end-of-the-season cards, past Algebra and Home Ec and PE and High School English, "there's always Bendo." He thumbed out a battered looking 3 x 5. "There's *always* Bendo."

And I took his emphasis and look for what they were intended as and sighed.

"Bendo?"

"Small school. One room. Mining town—or used to be. Ghost town now." He sighed wearily and let down his professional hair. "Ghost people, too. Can't keep a teacher there more than a year. Low pay—fair housing—at someone's home. No community activities—no social life. No city within 50 or so miles. No movies. No nothing but children to be taught. Ten of them this year. All grades."

"Sounds like the town I grew up in," I said. "Except we had two rooms and lots of community activities."

"I've been to Bendo." The Director leaned back in his

chair, hands behind his head. "Sick community. Unhappy people. No interest in anything. Only reason they have a school is because it's the law. Law-abiding, anyway. Not enough interest in anything to break a law, I guess."

"I'll take it," I said quickly before I could think beyond the feeling that this sounded about as far back as I could go to get a good running start at things again.

He glanced at me quizzically. "If you're thinking of lighting a torch of high reform to set Bendo afire with enthusiasm, forget it. I've seen plenty of king-sized torches fizzle out there."

"I have no torch," I said. "Frankly I'm fed to the teeth with bouncing bright enthusiasm and huge PTA's and activities until they come out your ears. They usually turn out to be the most monotonous kind of monotony. Bendo will be a rest."

"It will that," said the Director, leaning over his cards again. "Saul Diemus is the president of the Board. If you don't have a car, the only way to get to Bendo is by bus—it runs once a week."

I stepped out into the August sunshine after the interview and sagged a little under its savage pressure, almost hearing a hiss as the refrigerated coolness of the Placement Bureau evaporated from my skin.

I walked over to the Quad and sat down on one of the stone benches I'd never had time to use, those years ago when I was a student here. I looked up at my old dorm window and, for a moment, felt a wild homesickness—not only for years that were gone and hopes that died and dreams that had grim awakenings, but for a special magic I had found in that room. It was a magic—a true magic—that opened such vistas to me that for a while anything seemed possible, anything feasible—if not for me right now, then for Others, Someday. Even now, after the dilution of time, I couldn't quite believe that magic, and even now, as then, I wanted fiercely to believe it. If only it could be so! If only it could be so!

I sighed and stood up. I suppose everyone has a magic

moment somewhere in his life, and, like me, can't believe that anyone else could have the same—but mine *was* different! No one else *could* have had the same experience! I laughed at myself. Enough of the past and of dreaming. Bendo waited. I had things to do.

I watched the rolling clouds of red-yellow dust billow away from the jolting bus and cupped my hands over my face to get a breath of clean air. The grit between my teeth and the smothering sift of dust across my clothes was familiar enough to me, but I hoped by the time we reached Bendo we would have left this dust-plain behind and come into a little more vegetation. I shifted wearily on the angular seat, wondering if it had ever been designed for anyone's comfort, and caught myself as a sudden braking of the bus flung me forward.

We sat and waited for the dust of our going to catch up with us, while the last-but-me passenger, a withered old Indian, slowly gathered up his gunny sack bundles and his battered saddle and edged his levi'd, velveteen-bloused self up the aisle and out to the bleak roadside.

We roared away, leaving him a desolate figure in a wide desolation. I wondered where he was headed. How many weary miles to his hogan in what hidden wash or miniature greenness in all this wilderness.

Then we headed straight as a die for the towering redness of the bare mountains that lined the horizon. Peering ahead, I could see the road, ruler-straight disappearing into the distance. I sighed and shifted again and let the roar of the motor and the weariness of my bones lull me into a stupor on the border between sleep and waking.

A change in the motor roar brought me back to the jouncing bus. We jerked to a stop again. I looked out the window through the settling clouds of dust and wondered who we could be picking up out here in the middle of nowhere. Then a clot of dust dissolved and I saw

BENDO POST OFFICE
GENERAL STORE

Garage & Service Station
DRY GOODS & HARDWARE
MAGAZINES

in descending size on the front of the leaning, weather-beaten building propped between two crumbling, smoke-blackened stone ruins. After so much flatness, it was almost a shock to see the bare, tumbled boulders crowding down to the roadside and humping their lichen-stained shoulders against the sky.

"Bendo," said the bus driver, unfolding his lanky legs and hunching out of the bus. "End of the line—end of civilization—end of everything!" He grinned and the dusty mask of his face broke into engaging smile patterns.

"Small, isn't it?" I grinned back.

"Usta be bigger," he said. "Not that it helps now. Roaring mining town years ago." As he spoke, I could pick out disintegrating buildings dotting the rocky hillsides and tumbling into the steep washes. "My Dad can remember it when he was a kid. That was long enough ago that there was still a river for the town to be in the bend o'."

"Is *that* where it got its name?"

"Some say yes, some say no. Might have been a feller named Bendo." The driver grunted as he unlashed my luggage from the bus roof and swung it to the ground.

"Oh, hi!" said the driver.

I swung around to see who was there. The man was tall, well-built, good-looking—and old. Older than his face—older than years could have made him because he was really young, not much older than I. His face was a stern, unhappy stillness, his hands stiff on the brim of his stetson as he held it waist high.

In that brief pause before his, "Miss Amerson?" I felt the same feeling coming from him that you can feel around some highly religious person who knows God only as a stern implacable, vengeful diety, impatient of worthless man, waiting only for an unguarded moment to strike him down in his sin. I wondered who or what his God was that prisoned him so cruelly. Then I was answering, "Yes. How

do you do?" And he touched my hand briefly with a "Saul Diemus" and turned to the problem of my two large suitcases and my phonograph.

I followed Mr. Diemus' shuffling feet silently, since he seemed to have slight inclination for talk. I hadn't expected a reception committee, but kids must have changed a lot since I was one, otherwise curiosity about Teacher would have lured out at least a couple of them for a preview look. But the silent two of us walked on for a half block or so from the highway and the post office and rounded the rocky corner of a hill. I looked across the dry creek bed and up the one winding street that was residential Bendo. I paused on the splintery old bridge and took a good look. I'd never see Bendo like this again. Familiarity would blur some outlines and sharpen others, and I'd never again see it, free from the knowledge of who lived behind which blank front door.

The houses were scattered haphazardly over the hill-sides and erratic flights of rough stone steps led down from each to the road that paralleled the bone-dry creek bed. The houses were not shacks, but they were unpainted and weathered until they blended into the background almost perfectly. Each front yard had things growing in it, but such subdued blossomings and unobstrusive plantings that they could easily have been only accidental massings of natural vegetation.

Such a passion for anonymity . . .

"The school—" I had missed the swift thrust of his hand.

"Where?" Nothing I could see spoke school to me.

"Around the bend." This time I followed his indication and suddenly, out of the featurelessness of the place, I saw a bell tower barely topping the hill beyond the town, with the fine pencil stroke of a flagpole to one side. Mr. Diemus pulled himself together to make the effort.

"The school's in the prettiest place around here. There's a spring and trees, and . . ." He ran out of words and looked at me as though trying to conjure up something else I'd like to hear. "I'm board president," he said abruptly. "You'll have ten children from first grade to second

year high school. You're the boss in your school. Whatever you do is your business. Any discipline you find desirable—use. We don't pamper our children. Teach them what you have to. Don't bother the parents with reasons and explanations. The school is yours."

"And you'd just as soon do away with it and me too," I smiled at him.

He looked startled. "The law says school them," he started across the bridge. "So school them."

I followed meekly, wondering wryly what would happen if I asked Mr. Diemus why he hated himself and the world he was in and even—oh, breathe it softly—the children I was to "school."

"You'll stay at my place," he said. "We have an extra room."

I was uneasily conscious of the wide gap of silence that followed his pronouncement, but couldn't think of a thing to fill it. I shifted my small case from one hand to the other and kept my eyes on the rocky path that protested with shifting stones and vocal gravel every step we took. It seemed to me that Mr. Diemus was trying to make all the noise he could with his shuffling feet. But, in spite of the amplified echo from the hills around us, no door opened, no face pressed to a window. It was a distinct relief to hear suddenly the happy, unthinking rusty singing of hens as they scratched in the coarse dust.

I hunched up in the darkness of my narrow bed trying to comfort my uneasy stomach. It wasn't that the food had been bad—it had been quite adequate—but such a dingy meal! Gloom seemed to festoon itself from the ceiling and unhappiness sat almost visibly at the table.

I tried to tell myself that it was my own travel weariness that slanted my thoughts, but I looked around the table and saw the hopeless endurance furrowed into the adult faces and beginning faintly but unmistakably on those of the children. There were two children there. A girl, Sarah (fourth grade, at a guess), and an adolescent boy Matt (seventh?)—too silent, too well-mannered, too controlled,

avoiding much too pointedly looking at the empty chair between them.

My food went down in lumps and quarreled fiercely with the coffee that arrived in square-feeling gulps. Even yet—long difficult hours after the meal—the food still wouldn't lie down to be digested.

Tomorrow, I could slip into the pattern of school, familiar no matter where school was, since teaching kids is teaching kids no matter where. Maybe then I could convince my stomach that all was well, and then maybe even start to thaw those frozen, unnatural children. Of course they well might be little demons away from home—which is very often the case. Anyway, I felt, thankfully, the familiar September thrill of new beginnings.

I shifted in bed again, then stiffening my neck, lifted my ears clear off my pillow.

It was a whisper, the intermittent hissing I had been hearing. Someone was whispering in the next room to mine. I sat up and listened unashamedly. I knew Sarah's room was next to mine, but who was talking with her? At first I could get only half words and then either my ears sharpened or the voices became louder.

"... and did you hear her laugh? Right out loud at the table!" The quick whisper became a low voice. "Her eyes crinkled in the corners and she laughed."

"Our other teachers laughed, too." The uncertainly deep voice must be Matt.

"Yes," whispered Sarah. "But not for long. Oh, Matt! What's wrong with us? People in our books have fun. They laugh and run and jump and do all kinds of fun stuff and nobody—" Sarah faltered. "No one calls it evil."

"Those are only stories," said Matt. "Not real life."

"I don't believe it!" cried Sarah. "When I get big, I'm going away from Bendo. I'm going to see—"

"Away from Bendo!" Matt's voice broke in roughly. "Away from the Group?"

I lost Sarah's reply. I felt as though I had missed an expected step. As I wrestled with my breath, the sights and sounds and smells of my old dorm room crowded back

upon me. Then I caught myself. It was probably only a turn of phrase. This futile, desolate unhappiness couldn't possibly be related in any way to *that* magic. . . .

"Where is Dorcas?" Sarah asked, as though she knew the answer already.

"Punished." Matt's voice was hard and unchildlike. "She jumped."

"Jumped!" Sarah was shocked.

"Over the edge of the porch. Clear down to the path. Father saw her. I think she let him see her on purpose." His voice was defiant. "Someday when I get older, I'm going to jump, too—all I want to—even over the house. Right in front of Father."

"Oh, Matt!" The cry was horrified and admiring. "You wouldn't! You couldn't. Not so far, not right in front of father!"

"I would so," retorted Matt. "I could so, because I—" His words cut off sharply. "Sarah," he went on, "can you figure any way, *any* way that jumping could be evil? It doesn't hurt anyone. It isn't ugly. There isn't any law—"

"Where is Dorcas?" Sarah's voice was almost inaudible. "In the hidey-hole again?" Almost she was answering Matt's question instead of asking one of her own.

"Yes," said Matt. "In the dark with only bread to eat. So she can learn what a hunted animal feels like. An animal that is different, that other animals hate and hunt." His bitter voice put quotes around the words.

"You see," whispered Sarah. "You see?"

In the silence following, I heard the quiet closing of a door and the slight vibration of the floor as Matt passed my room. I eased back onto my pillow. I lay back, staring toward the ceiling. What dark thing was here in this house? In this community? Frightened children whispering in the dark. Rebellious children in hidey-holes learning how hunted animals feel. And a Group. . . ? No it couldn't be. It was just the recent reminder of being on campus again that made me even consider that this darkness might in some way be the reverse of the golden coin Karen had showed me.

Almost my heart failed me when I saw the school. It was one of those brick monstrosities that went up around the turn of the century. This one had been built for a boom town, but now all the upper windows were boarded up and obviously long out of use. The lower floor was blank too, except for two rooms—though with the handful of children quietly standing around the door, it was apparent that only one room was needed. And not only was the building deserted: the yard was swept clean from side to side, innocent of grass or trees—or playground equipment. There *was* a deep grove just beyond the school, though, and the glint of water down canyon.

"No swings?" I asked the three children who were escorting me. "No slides? No seesaws?"

"No!" Sarah's voice was unhappily surprised. Matt scowled at her warningly.

"No," he said, "We don't swing or slide—nor see a saw!" He grinned up at me faintly.

"What a shame!" I said. "Did they all wear out? Can't the school afford new ones?"

"We don't swing or slide or seesaw." The grin was dead. "We don't believe in it."

There's nothing quite so flat and incontestable as that last statement. I've heard it as an excuse for practically every type of omission but, so help me! never applied to playground equipment. I couldn't think of a reply any more intelligent than *oh* so I didn't say anything.

All week long I felt as if I were wading through knee-deep jello or trying to lift a king-sized feather bed up over my head. I used up every device I ever thought of to rouse the class to enthusiasm—about anything, *anything*! They were polite and submissive and did what was asked of them, but joylessly, apathetically, enduringly.

Finally, just before dismissal time on Friday, I leaned in desperation across my desk.

"Don't you like *anything*?" I pleaded. "Isn't *anything* fun?"

Dorcas Diemus' mouth opened into the tense silence. I saw Matt kick quickly, warningly against the leg of the

desk. Her mouth closed.

"I think school is fun," I said. "I think we can enjoy all kinds of things. I want to enjoy teaching, but I can't unless you enjoy learning."

"We learn," said Dorcas quickly. "We aren't stupid."

"You learn," I acknowledged. "You aren't stupid. But don't any of you *like* school?"

"I like school," piped up Martha, my first grade. "I think it's fun!"

"Thank you, Martha," I said, "And the rest of you—" I glared at them in mock anger. "You're going to have fun if I have to beat it into you!"

To my dismay, they shrank down apprehensively in their seats and exchanged troubled glances. But before I could hastily explain myself, Matt laughed and Dorcas joined him. And I beamed fatuously to hear the hesitant rusty laughter spread across the room, but I saw Esther's hands shake as she wiped tears from her ten-year-old eyes. Tears—of laughter?

That night I twisted in the darkness of my room, almost too tired to sleep, worrying and wondering. What had blighted these people? They had health, they had beauty—the curve of Martha's cheek against the window was a song, the lift of Dorcas' eyebrows was breathless grace. They were fed . . . adequately, clothed . . . adequately, housed . . . adequately, but nothing like they could have been. I'd seen more joy and delight and enthusiasm from little campground kids who slept in cardboard shacks and washed—if they ever did—in canals and ate whatever edible came their way, but grinned, even when impetigo or cold sores bled across their grins.

But these lifeless kids! My prayers were troubled and I slept restlessly.

A month or so later, things had improved a little bit—but not much. At least there was more relaxation in the classroom. And I found that they had no deep-rooted convictions against plants, so we had things growing on the deep window sills—stuff we transplanted from the spring

and from among the trees. And we had jars of minnows from the creek and one drowsy horney-toad who roused in his box of dirt only to flick up the ants brought for his dinner. And we sang—loudly and enthusiastically—but, miracle of miracles, without even one monotone in the whole room. But we *didn't* sing “Up, Up In The Sky” nor “How Do You Like To Go Up In A Swing?” My solos of such songs were received with embarrassed blushes and lowered eyes!

There had been one dust-up between us though—this matter of shuffling everywhere they walked.

“Pick up your feet, for goodness’ sake,” I said irritably one morning when the *shoosh, shoosh, shoosh* of their coming and going finally got my skin off. “Surely they’re not so heavy you can’t lift them.”

Timmy, who happened to be the trigger this time, nibbled unhappily at one finger. “I can’t,” he whispered. “Not supposed to.”

“Not supposed to?” I forgot momentarily how warily I’d been going with these frightened mice of children. “Why not? Surely there’s no reason in the world why you can’t walk quietly.”

Matt looked unhappily over at Miriam, the sophomore who was our entire high school. She looked aside, biting her lower lip, troubled. Then she turned back and said, “It is customary in Bendo.”

“To shuffle along?” I was forgetting any manners I had. “Whatever for?”

“That’s the way we do in Bendo.” There was no anger in her defense, only resignation.

“Perhaps that’s the way you do at home,” I said. “But here at school let’s pick our feet up. It makes too much disturbance otherwise.”

“But it’s bad—” began Esther.

Matt’s hand shushed her in a hurry.

“Mr. Diemus said what we did at school was my business,” I told them. “He said not to bother your parents with our problems. One of our problems is too much noise when others are trying to work. At least in our schoolroom,

let's lift our feet and walk quietly."

The children considered the suggestion solemnly and turned to Matt and Miriam for guidance. They both nodded and we went back to work. For the next few minutes, from the corner of my eyes, I saw with amazement all the unnecessary trips back and forth across the room, with high lifted feet, with grins and side glances that marked such trips as high adventure—as a delightfully daring thing to do! The whole deal had me bewildered. Thinking back, I realized that not only the children of Bendo scuffled, but all the adults did too—as though they were afraid to lose contact with the earth, as though . . . I shook my head and went on with the lesson.

Before noon, though, the endless *shoosh, shoosh, shoosh*, of feet began again. Habit was too much for the children. So I silently filed the sound under *Uncurable, Endurable*, and let the matter drop.

I sighed as I watched the children leave at lunch time. It seemed to me that with the unprecedented luxury of a whole hour for lunch, they'd all go home. The bell tower was visible from nearly every house in town. But instead, they all brought tight little paper sacks with dull crumbly sandwiches and unimaginative apples in them. And silently, with their dull scuffly steps they disappeared into the thicket of trees around the spring.

Everything is dulled around here, I thought. Even the sunlight is blunted as it floods the hills and canyons. There is no mirth, no laughter. No high jinks or cutting up. No pre-adolescent silliness. No adolescent foolishness. Just quiet children, enduring.

I don't usually snoop, but I began wondering if perhaps the kids were different when they were away from me—and from their parents. So when I got back at 12:30 from an adequate but uninspired lunch at Diemus' house, I kept on walking past the school house and quietly down into the grove, moving cautiously through the scanty undergrowth until I could lean over a lichened boulder and look down on the children.

Some were lying around on the short still grass, hands

under their heads, blinking up at the brightness of the sky between the leaves. Esther and little Martha were hunting out fillaree seed pods and counting the tines of the pitchforks and rakes and harrows they resembled. I smiled, remembering how I used to do the same thing.

"I dreamed last night," Dorcas thrust the statement defiantly into the drowsy silence. "I dreamed about The Home."

My sudden astonished movement was covered by Martha's horrified, "Oh, Dorcas!"

"What's wrong with The Home?" cried Dorcas, her cheeks scarlet. "There *was* a Home! There *was*! There *was*! Why shouldn't we talk about it?"

I listened avidly. This couldn't be just coincidence—a Group and now The Home. There must be some connection. . . . I pressed closer against the rough rock.

"But it's bad!" cried Esther. "You'll be punished! We can't talk about The Home!"

"Why not?" asked Joel as though it had just occurred to him, as things do just occur to you when you're thirteen. He sat up slowly. "Why can't we?"

There was a short tense silence.

"I've dreamed too," said Matt. "I've dreamed of The Home—and it's *good*, it's good!"

"Who hasn't dreamed?" asked Miriam. "We all have, haven't we? Even our parents. I can tell by Mother's eyes when she has."

"Did you ever ask how come we aren't supposed to talk about it?" asked Joel. "I mean and ever get any answer except that it's bad."

"I think it has something to do with a long time ago," said Matt. "Something about when the Group first came—"

"I don't think it's just dreams," declared Miriam, "because I don't have to be asleep. I think it's Remembering."

"Remembering?" asked Dorcas. "How can we remember something we never knew?"

"I don't know," admitted Miriam, "But I'll bet it is."

"I remember," volunteered Talitha—who never volunteered anything.

"Hush!" whispered Abie, the second grade next-to-youngest who always whispered.

"I remember," Talitha went on stubbornly. "I remember a dress that was too little so the mother just stretched the skirt till it was long enough and it stayed stretched. 'Nen she pulled the waist out big enough and the little girl put it on and flew away."

"Hohl!" Timmy scoffed. "I remember better than that." His face stilled and his eyes widened. "The ship was so tall it was like a mountain and the people went in the high, high door and they didn't have a ladder. 'Nen there were stars, big burning ones—not squinchy little ones like ours."

"It went too fast!" That was Abie! Talking eagerly! "When the air came it made the ship hot and the little baby died before all the little boats left the ship." He scoonched down suddenly, leaning against Talitha and whimpering.

"You see!" Miriam lifted her chin triumphantly. "We've all dreamed—I mean remembered!"

"I guess so," said Matt. "I remember. It's *lifting*, Talitha, not flying. You go and go as high as you like, as far as you want to and don't *ever* have to touch the ground—at all! At all!" He pounded his fist into the gravelly red soil beside him.

"And you can dance in the air, too," sighed Miriam. "Freer than a bird, lighter than—"

Esther scrambled to her feet, white-faced and panic stricken. "Stop! Stop! It's evil! It's bad! I'll tell Father! We can't dream—or lift—or dance! It's bad, it's bad! You'll die for it! You'll die for it!"

Joel jumped to his feet and grabbed Esther's arm.

"Can we die any deader?" he cried, shaking her brutally, "You call *this* being alive?" He hunched down apprehensively and shambled a few scuffling steps across the clearing.

I fled blindly back to school, trying to wink away my tears without admitting I was crying, crying for these poor

kids who were groping so hopelessly for something they knew they should have. Why was it so rigorously denied them? Surely, if they were what I thought them . . . And they could be! They could be!

I grabbed the bell rope and pulled hard. Reluctantly the bell moved and rolled.

"*One o'clock,*" it clanged. "*One o'clock!*"

I watched the children returning with slow, uneager, shuffling steps.

That night I started a letter:

Dear Karen,

Yep, 'sme after all these years. And, oh, Karen! I've found some more! Some more of The People! Remember how much you wished you knew if any other Groups besides yours had survived the Crossing? How you worried about them and wanted to find them if they had? Well, *I've* found a whole Group! But it's a sick, unhappy group. Your heart would break to see them. If you could come and start them on the right path again . . .

I put my pen down. I looked at the lines I had written and then crumpled the paper slowly. This was *my* Group. I had found them. Sure, I'd tell Karen—but later. Later, after—well, after *I* had tried to start them on the right path—at least the children.

After all, I knew a little of their potentialities. Hadn't Karen briefed me in those unguarded magical hours in the old Dorm, drawn to me as I was to her by some mutual sympathy that seemed stronger than the usual roommate attachment, telling me things no outsider had a right to hear? And if, when I finally told her and turned the Group over to her, if it could be a joyous gift—then I could feel that I had repaid her a little for the wonder world she had opened to me.

Yeah, I thought ruefully—and there's nothing like a large portion of ignorance to give one a large portion of confidence. But I did want to try—desperately. Maybe if I could break prison for someone else, then perhaps my own bars . . . I dropped the paper in the wastebasket.

But it was several weeks before I could bring myself to do anything to let the children know I knew about them. It was such an impossible situation, even if it were true—and if it weren't, what kind of lunacy would they suspect me of?

When I finally set my teeth and swore a swear to myself that I'd do something definite, my hands shook and my breath was a flutter in my dry throat.

"Today," I said with an effort. "Today is Friday." Which gem of wisdom the children received with charitable silence. "We've been working hard all week so let's have fun today." This stirred the children—half with pleasure, half with apprehension. They, poor kids, found my "fun" much harder than any kind of work I could give them. But some of them were acquiring a taste for it. Martha had even learned to skip!

"First, monitors pass the composition paper." Esther and Abie scuffled hurriedly around with the paper, and the pencil sharpener got a thorough work-out. At least these kids didn't differ from others in their pleasure with grinding their pencils away at the slightest excuse.

"Now," I gulped. "We're going to write." Which obvious asininity was passed over with forbearance, though Miriam looked at me wonderingly before she bent her head and let her hair shadow her face. "Today I want you all to write about the same thing. Here is our subject."

Gratefully I turned my back on the children's waiting eyes and printed slowly:

I REMEMBER THE HOME

I heard the sudden intake of breath that worked itself downward from Miriam to Talitha and then the rapid whisper that informed Abie and Martha. I heard Esther's muffled cry and I turned slowly around and leaned against the desk.

"There are so many beautiful things to remember about The Home," I said into the strained silence. "So many wonderful things. And even the sad memories are better than forgetting, because The Home was *good*. Tell me what you remember about The Home."

"We can't!" Joel and Matt were on their feet simultaneously.

"Why can't we?" cried Dorcas. "Why can't we?"

"It's bad!" cried Esther. "It's evil!"

"It aint either!" shrilled Abie, astonishingly. "It ain't either!"

"We shouldn't." Miriam's trembling hands brushed her heavy hair upward. "It's forbidden."

"Sit down," I said gently. "The day I arrived at Bendo, Mr. Diemus told me to teach you what I had to teach you. I have to teach you that Remembering The Home is good."

"Then why don't the grownups think so?" Matt asked slowly. "They tell us not to talk about it. We shouldn't disobey our parents."

"I know," I admitted, "and I would never ask you children to go against your parents' wishes—unless I felt that it is very important. If you'd rather they didn't know about it at first, keep it as our secret. Mr. Diemus told me not to bother them with explanations or reasons. I'll make it right with your parents when the time comes." I paused to swallow and to blink away a vision of me, leaving town in a cloud of dust barely ahead of a posse of irate parents. "Now, everyone busy," I said briskly. "I Remember The Home."

There was a moment heavy with decision and I held my breath, wondering which way the balance would dip. And then—surely it must have been because they wanted so to speak and to affirm the wonder of what had been that they capitulated so easily. Heads bent and pencils scurried. And Martha sat, her head bowed on her desk with sorrow

"I don't know enough words," she mourned. "How do you write *toolas*?"

And Abie laboriously erased a hole through his paper and licked his pencil again.

"Why don't you and Abie make some pictures?" I suggested. "Make a little story with pictures and we can staple them together like a real book."

I looked over the silent, busy group and let myself relax, feeling weakness flood into my knees. I scrubbed the

dampness from my palms with Kleenex and sat back in my chair. Slowly I became conscious of a new atmosphere in my classroom. An intolerable strain was gone, an unconscious holding back of the children, a wariness, a watchfulness, a guilty feeling of desiring what was forbidden.

A prayer of thanksgiving began to well up inside me. It changed hastily to a plea for mercy as I began to visualize what might happen to me when the parents found out what I was doing. How long must this containment and denial have gone on? This concealment and this carefully nourished fear? From what Karen had told me, it must be well over fifty years—long enough to mark indelibly three generations.

And here I was with my fine little hatchet trying to set a little world afire! On which very mixed metaphor, I stiffened my weak knees and got up from my chair. I walked unnoticed up and down the aisles, stepping aside as Joel went blindly to the shelf for more paper, leaning over Miriam to marvel that she had taken out her Crayolas and part of her writing was with colors, part with pencil—and the colors spoke to something in me that the pencil couldn't reach though I'd never seen the forms the colors took.

The children had gone home, happy and excited, chattering and laughing, until they reached the edge of the school grounds. There smiles died and laughter stopped and faces and feet grew heavy again. All but Esther's. Hers had never been light. I sighed and turned to the papers. Here was Abie's little book. I thumbed through it and drew a deep breath and went back through it slowly again.

A second grader drawing this? Six pages—six finished, adult-looking pages. Crayolas achieving effects I'd never seen before—pictures that told a story loudly and clearly.

Stars blazing in a black sky, with the slender needle of a ship, like a mote in the darkness.

The vasty green cloud-shrouded arc of earth against the blackness. A pink tinge of beginning friction along

the ship's belly. I put my finger to the glow. Almost I could feel the heat.

Inside the ship, suffering and pain, heroic striving, crumpled bodies and seared faces. A baby dead in its mother's arms. Then a swarm of tinier needles erupting from the womb of the ship. And the last shriek of incandescence as the ship volatilized against the thickening drag of the air.

I leaned my head on my hands and closed my eyes. All this, all *this* in the memory of an eight-year-old? All *this* in the feelings of an eight-year-old? Because Abie knew—he *knew* how this felt. He knew the heat and strivings and the dying and fleeing. No wonder Abie whispered and leaned. Racial memory was truly a two-sided coin.

I felt a pang of misgivings. Maybe I was wrong to let him remember so vividly. Maybe I shouldn't have let him

I turned to Martha's papers. They were delicate, almost spidery drawings of some fuzzy little animal (*toolas?*) that apparently built a hanging, hammocky nest and gathered fruit in a huge leaf-basket and had a bird for a friend. A truly out-of-this-world bird. Much of her story escaped me because first graders—if anyone at all—produce symbolic art, and, since her frame of reference and mine were so different, there was much that I couldn't interpret. But her whole booklet was joyous and light.

And now, the stories—

I lifted my head and blinked into the twilight. I had finished all the papers except Esther's. It was her cramped writing, swimming in darkness, that made me realize that the day was gone and that I was shivering in a shadowy room with the fire in the old-fashioned heater gone out.

Slowly I shuffled the papers into my desk drawer, hesitated, and took out Esther's. I would finish at home. I shrugged into my coat and wandered home, my thoughts intent on the papers I had read. And suddenly I wanted to cry—to cry for the wonders that had been and were no more. For the heritage of attainment and achievement these children had, but couldn't use. For the dream-come-

true of what they were capable of doing, but weren't permitted to do. For the homesick yearning that filled every line they had written—these unhappy exiles, three generations removed from any physical knowledge of The Home.

I stopped on the bridge and leaned against the railing in the half dark. Suddenly I felt a welling homesickness. *That was what the world should be like—what it could be like if only—if only . . .*

But my tears for The Home were as hidden as the emotions of Mrs. Diemus when she looked up uncuriously as I came through the kitchen door.

"Good evening," she said. "I've kept your supper warm."

"Thank you." I shivered convulsively. "It is getting cold."

I sat on the edge of my bed that night, letting the memory of the kids' papers wash over me, trying to fill in around the bits and snippets that they had told of The Home. And then I began to wonder. All of them who wrote about the actual Home had been so happy with their memories. From Timmy and his *Shinny ship as high as a montin and faster than two jets*, and Dorcas's wandering tenses as though yesterday and today were one, *The flowers were like lights. At night it isn't dark becas they shine so bright and when the moon came up the breeos sing and the music was so you can see it like rain falling around only happyer*, up to Miriam's wistful *On Gathering Day there was a big party. Everybody came dressed in beautiful clothes with Flahmen in the girl's hair. Flahmen are flowers but they're good to eat. And if a girl felt her heart sing for a boy, they ate a Flahmen together and started two-ing.*

Then, if all these memories were so happy, why the rigid suppression of them by grownups? Why the pall of unhappiness over everyone? You can't mourn forever for a wrecked ship. Why a hidey-hole for disobedient children? Why the misery and frustration when, if they could do half of what I didn't fully understand from Joel and Matt's highly technical papers, they could make Bendo

an Eden—

I had reached for Esther's paper. I had put it on the bottom on purpose. I dreaded reading it. She had sat with her head buried on her arms on her desk most of the time the others were writing busily. At widely separated intervals she scribbled a line or two as though she were doing something shameful. She, of all the children, had seemed to find no relief in her remembering.

I smoothed the paper on my lap.

I remember, she had written. "We were thirsty. There was water in the creek we were hiding in the grass. We could not drink. They would shoot us. Three days the sun was hot. She screamed for water and ran to the creek. They shot. The water got red.

Blistered spots marked the tears on the paper.

They found a baby under a bush. The man hit it with the wood part of his gun. He hit it and hit it and hit it. I hit scorpions like that.

They caught us and put us in a pen. They built a fire all around us. Fly "they said" fly and save yourselves. We flew because it hurt. They shot us.

Monster "they yelled" evil monsters. People can't fly. People can't move things. People are the same. You aren't people. Die die die.

Then blackly, traced and retraced until the paper split:
If anyone finds out we are not of earth we will die.

Keep your feet on the ground.

Blackly I laid the paper aside. So there was the answer, putting Karen's bits and snippets together with these. The shipwrecked ones finding savages on the desert island. A remnant surviving by learning caution, suppression and denial. Another generation that pinned the *evil* label on The Home to insure continued immunity for their children, and now, a generation that questioned and wondered—and rebelled.

I turned off the light and slowly got into bed. I lay there staring into the darkness, holding the picture Esther had evoked. Finally I relaxed. "God help us," I sighed. "God help us all."

Another week was nearly over. We cleaned the room up quickly, for once anticipating the fun time instead of dreading it. I smiled to hear the happy racket all around me, and felt my own spirits surge upward in response to the lightheartedness of the children. The difference that one afternoon had made in them! Now they were beginning to feel like children to me. They were beginning to accept me. I swallowed with an effort. How soon would they ask *how come?* How come I knew? There they sat, all nine of them—nine, because Esther was my first absence in the year—bright-eyed and expectant.

"Can we write again?" asked Sarah, "I can remember lots more."

"No," I said. "Not today." Smiles died and there was a protesting wiggle through the room. "Today, we are going to *do*. Joel." I looked at him and tightened my jaws. "Joel, give me the dictionary." He began to get up. "*... without leaving your seat!*"

"But I—!" Joel broke the shocked silence. "I can't!"

"Yes you can," I prayed. "Yes you can. Give me the dictionary. Here, on my desk."

Joel turned and stared at the big old dictionary that spilled pages 1965 to 1998 out of its cracked old binding. Then he said, "Miriam?" in a high, tight voice. But she shook her head and shrank back in her seat, her eyes big and dark in her white face.

"You can." Miriam's voice was hardly more than a breath. "It's just bigger—"

Joel clutched the edge of his desk and sweat started out on his forehead. There was a stir of movement on the bookshelf. Then, as though shot from a gun, pages 1965 to 1998 whisked to my desk and fell fluttering. Our laughter cut through the blank amazement and we laughed till tears came.

"That's a-doing it, Joel!" shouted Matt. "That's showing them your muscles!"

"Well, it's a beginning," grinned Joel weakly. "You do it, brother, if you think it's so easy."

So Matt sweated and strained and Joel joined with him,

but they only managed to scrape the book to the edge of the shelf where it teetered dangerously.

Then Abie waved his hand timidly. "I can, teacher," he said.

I beamed that my silent one had spoken and at the same time frowned at the loving laughter of the big kids.

"Okay, Abie," I encouraged. "You show them how to do it."

And the dictionary swung off the shelf and glided unhastily to my desk, where it came silently to rest.

Everyone stared at Abie and he squirmed. "The little ships," he defended. "That's the way they moved them out of the big ship. Just like that."

Joel and Matt turned their eyes to some inner concentration and then exchanged exasperated looks.

"Why, sure," said Matt. "Why sure." And the dictionary swung back to the shelf.

"Hey!" protested Timmy. "It's my turn!"

"That poor dictionary," I said. "It's too old for all this bouncing around. Just put the loose pages back on the shelf."

And he did.

Everyone sighed and looked at me expectantly.

"Miriam?" She clasped her hands convulsively. "You come to me," I said, feeling a chill creep across my stiff shoulders. "*Lift* to me, Miriam."

Without taking her eyes from me, she slipped out of her seat and stood in the aisle. Her skirts swayed a little as her feet lifted from the floor. Slowly at first and then more quickly she came to me, soundlessly, through the air, until in a little flurried rush, her arms went around me and she gasped into my shoulder. I put her aside, trembling. I groped for my handkerchief. I said shakily, "Miriam, help the rest. I'll be back in a minute."

And I stumbled into the room next door. Huddled down in the dust and debris of the catch-all store room it had become, I screamed soundlessly into my muffling hands. And screamed and screamed! Because after all—*after all!*

And then suddenly, with a surge of pure panic, I heard

a sound—the sound of footsteps, many footsteps, approaching the school house. I jumped for the door and wrenched it open just in time to see the outside door open. There was Mr. Diemus and Esther and Esther's father, Mr. Jonso.

In one of those flashes of clarity that engrave your mind in a split second, I saw my whole classroom.

Joel and Matt were chinning themselves on non-existent bars, their heads brushing the high ceiling as they grunted upwards. Abie was swinging in a swing that wasn't there, arcing across the corner of the room, just missing the stove pipe from the old stove, as he chanted, "Up in a swing, up in a swing!" This wasn't the first time *they* had tried their wings! Miriam was kneeling in a circle with the other girls and they were all coaxing their books up to hover unsupported above the floor, while Timmy *v-roomm-vroomed* two paper jet planes through intricate maneuvers in and out the rows of desks.

My soul curdled in me as I met Mr. Diemus' eyes. Esther gave a choked cry as she saw what the children were doing, and the girls' stricken faces turned to the intruders. Matt and Joel crumpled to the floor and scrambled to their feet. But Abie, absorbed by his wonderful new accomplishment, swung on, all unconscious of what was happening until Talitha frantically screamed "Abiel!"

Startled, he jerked around and saw the forbidding group at the door. With a disappointed cry, as though a loved toy had been snatched from him, he stopped there in mid-air, his fists clenched. And then, realizing, he screamed, a terrified, panic-stricken cry, and slanted sharply upward, trying to escape, and ran full tilt into the corner of the high old map case, sideswiping it with his head, and, reeling backwards, fell!

I tried to catch him. I did! I did! But I only caught one small hand as he plunged down onto the old wood-burning heater beneath him. And the crack of his skull against the ornate edge of the cast-iron lid was loud in the silence.

I straightened the crumpled little body carefully, not daring to touch the quiet little head. Mr. Diemus and I looked at one another as we knelt on opposite sides of the

child. His lips opened, but I plunged before he could get started.

"If he dies," I bit my words off viciously, "you killed him!"

His mouth opened again, mainly from astonishment. "I—" he began.

"Barging in on my classroom!" I raged. "Interrupting class work! Frightening my children! It's all your fault, your fault!" I couldn't bear the burden of guilt alone. I just had to have someone share it with me. But the fire died and I smoothed Abie's hand, trembling. "Please call a doctor. He might be dying."

"Nearest one is in Tortura Pass," said Mr. Diemus. "Sixty miles by road."

"Cross country?" I asked.

"Two mountain ranges and an alkali plateau."

"Then—then—" Abie's hand was so still in mine.

"There's a doctor at the Tumble A ranch," said Joel faintly. "He's taking a vacation."

"Go get him." I held Joel with my eyes. "*Go as fast as you know how!*"

Joel gulped miserably. "Okay."

"They'll probably have horses to come back on," I said. "Don't be too obvious."

"Okay," and he ran out the door. We heard the thud of his running feet until he was halfway across the school yard, then silence. Faintly, seconds later, creek gravel crunched below the hill. I could only guess at what he was doing—that he couldn't lift all the way and was going in jumps whose length was beyond all reasonable measuring.

The children had gone home, quietly, anxiously. And, after the doctor arrived, we had improvised a stretcher and carried Abie to the Peters home. I walked along close beside him watching his pinched little face, my hand touching his chest occasionally just to be sure he was still breathing.

And now—the waiting . . .

I looked at my watch again. A minute past the last time

I looked. Sixty seconds by the hands, but hours and hours by anxiety.

"He'll be all right," I whispered, mostly to comfort myself. "The doctor will know what to do."

Mr. Diemus turned his dark empty eyes to me. "Why did you do it?" he asked. "We almost had it stamped out. We were almost free."

"Free of what?" I took a deep breath. "Why did *you* do it? Why did you deny your children their inheritance?"

"It isn't your concern—"

"Anything that hampers my children is my concern. Anything that turns children into creeping, frightened mice is wrong. Maybe I went at the whole deal the wrong way, but you told me to teach them what I had to—and I did."

"Disobedience, rebellion, flouting authority—"

"They obeyed *me*," I retorted. "They accepted *my* authority!" Then I softened. "I can't blame them," I confessed. "They were troubled. They told me it was wrong—that they had been *taught* it was wrong. I argued them into it. But oh, Mr. Diemus! It took so little argument, such a tiny breach in the dam to loose the flood. They never even questioned my knowledge—any more than you have, Mr. Diemus! All this—this *wonder* was beating against their minds, fighting to be set free. The rebellion was there long before I came. I didn't incite them to something new. I'll bet there's not a one, except maybe Esther, who hasn't practiced and practiced, furtively and ashamed, the things I permitted—demanded that they do for me.

"It wasn't fair—not fair at all—to hold them back."

"You don't understand." Mr. Diemus' face was stony. "You haven't all the facts—"

"I have enough," I replied. "So you have a frightened memory of an unfortunate period in your history. But what people *doesn't* have such a memory in larger or lesser degree? That you and your children have it more vividly should have helped, not hindered. You should have been able to figure out ways of adjusting. But leave that for the moment. Take the other side of the picture. What

possible thing could all this suppression and denial yield you more precious than what you gave up?"

"It's the only way," said Mr. Diemus. "We are unacceptable to earth, but we have to stay. We have to conform—"

"Of course you had to conform," I cried. "Anyone has to when they change societies. At least enough to get them by until others can adjust to them. But to crawl in a hole and pull it in after you! Why, the other Group—"

"Other Group!" Mr. Diemus whitened, his eyes widening. "Other Group? There are others? There are others?" He leaned tensely forward in his chair. "Where? Where?" And his voice broke shrilly on the last word. He closed his eyes and his mouth trembled as he fought for control. The bedroom door opened. Dr. Curtis came out, his shoulders weary.

He looked from Mr. Diemus to me and back. "He should be in a hospital. There's a depressed fracture and I don't know what all else. Probably extensive brain involvement. We need X-rays and—and—" He rubbed his hand slowly over his weary young face. "Frankly, I'm not experienced to handle cases like this. We need specialists. If you can scare up some kind of transportation that won't jostle . . ." He shook his head, seeing the kind of country that lay between us and anyplace, and went back into the bedroom.

"He's dying," said Mr. Diemus. "Whether you're right or we're right, he's dying."

"Wait! Wait!" I said, catching at the tag end of a sudden idea. "Let me think." Urgently I willed myself back through the years to the old Dorm room. Intently I listened and listened and remembered.

"Have you a—a—*Sorter* in this Group?" I asked, fumbling for unfamiliar terms.

"No," said Mr. Diemus. "One who could have been, but isn't."

"Or *any* communicator?" I asked. "Anyone who can send or receive?"

"No," said Mr. Diemus, sweat starting on his forehead. "One who could have been, but—"

"See?" I accused. "See what you've traded for . . . for

what? Who are the coulds but can'ts? Who are they?"

"I am," said Mr. Diemus, the words a bitterness in his mouth. "And my wife."

I stared at him, wondering confusedly. How far did training decide? What could we do with what we had?

"Look," I said quickly. "There is another Group. And they—they have all the Signs and Persuasions. Karen's been trying to find you—to find any of the People. She told me—oh, Lord; it's been years ago, I hope it's still so—every evening they send out calls for the People. If we can catch it—if *you* can catch the call and answer it, they can help. I know they can. Faster than cars, faster than planes, more surely than specialists—"

"But if the doctor finds out—" wavered Mr. Diemus fearfully.

I stood up abruptly. "Good night, Mr. Diemus," I said, turning to the door. "Let me know when Abie dies."

His cold hand shook on my arm.

"Can't you see!" he cried. "I've been taught too, longer and stronger than the children! We never even dared *think* of rebellion! Help me, help me!"

"Get your wife," I said. "Get her and Abie's mother and father. Bring them down to the grove. We can't do anything here in the house. It's too heavy with denial."

I hurried on ahead and sank down on my knees in the evening shadows among the trees.

"I don't know what I'm doing," I cried into the bend of my arm. "I have an idea, but I don't know! Help us! Guide us!"

I opened my eyes to the arrival of the four.

"We told him we were going out to pray," said Mr. Diemus.

And we all did.

Then Mr. Diemus began the call I worded for him, silently, but with such intensity that sweat started again on his face. *Karen, Karen, Come to the People, Come to the People.* And the other three sat around him, bolstering his effort, supporting his cry. I watched their tense faces, my own twisting in sympathy, and time was lost as we

labored.

Then slowly his breathing calmed and his face relaxed and I felt a stirring as though something brushed past my mind. Mrs. Diemus whispered, "He remembers now. He's found the way."

And as the last spark of sun caught mica highlights on the hilltop above us, Mr. Diemus stretched his hands out slowly and said with infinite relief, "There they are."

I looked around startled, half expecting to see Karen coming through the trees. But Mr. Diemus spoke again.

"Karen, we need help. One of our Group is dying. We have a doctor, an Outsider, but he hasn't the equipment or the know-how to help. What shall we do?"

In the pause that followed, I was slowly conscious of a new feeling. I couldn't tell you exactly what it was—a kind of unfolding . . . an opening . . . a relaxation. The ugly tight defensiveness that was so characteristic of the grown-ups of Bendo was slipping away.

"Yes, Valancy," said Mr. Diemus. "He's in a bad way. We can't help because—" His voice faltered and his words died. I felt a resurgence of fear and unhappiness as his communication went beyond words, and then ebbed back to speech again.

"We'll expect you then. You know the way."

I could see the pale blur of his face in the dusk under the trees as he turned back to us.

"They're coming," he said, wonderingly. "Karen and Valancy. They're so pleased to find us—" His voice broke. "We're *not* alone—"

And I turned away as the two couples merged in the darkness. I had pushed them somewhere way beyond me.

It was a lonely, lonely walk back to the house for me alone.

They dropped down through the half darkness—four of them. For a fleeting second I wondered at myself that I could stand there matter-of-factly watching four adults slant calmly down out of the sky. Not a hair ruffled, not a stain of travel on them, knowing that only a short time

before they had been hundreds of miles away—not even aware that Bendo existed.

But all strangeness was swept away as Karen hugged me delightedly.

"It is you!" she cried. "He said it was, but I wasn't sure! Oh, it's so *good* to see you again! Who owes who a letter?"

She laughed and turned to the smiling three. "Valancy, the Old One of our Group." Valancy's radiant face proved the Old One didn't mean age. "Bethie, our Sensitive." The slender, fair-haired young girl ducked her head shyly. "And my brother Jemmy. Valancy's his wife."

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Diemus," I said. "And Mr. and Mrs. Peters, Abie's parents. It's Abie, you know. My second grade." I was suddenly overwhelmed by how long ago and far away school felt. How far I'd gone from my accustomed pattern!

"What shall we do about the doctor?" I asked. "Will he have to know?"

"Yes," said Valancy. "We can help him, but we can't do the actual work. Can we trust him?"

I hesitated, remembering the few scanty glimpses I'd had of him. "I—" I began.

"Pardon me," said Karen. "I wanted to save time. I went in to you. We know now what you know of him. We'll trust Dr. Curtis."

I felt an eerie creeping up my spine. To have my thoughts taken so casually! Even to the doctor's name!

Bethie stirred restlessly and looked at Valancy. "He'll be in convulsions soon. We'd better hurry."

"You're sure you have the knowledge?" asked Valancy.

"Yes," murmured Bethie. "If I can make the doctor see—if he's willing to follow."

"Follow what?"

The heavy tones of the doctor's voice startled us all as he stepped out on the porch.

I stood aghast at the impossibility of the task ahead of us and looked at Karen and Valancy to see how they would make the doctor understand. They said nothing. They just looked at him. There was a breathless pause. The doctor's

startled face caught the glint of light from the open door as he turned to Valancy. He rubbed his hand across his face in bewilderment and, after a moment, turned to me.

"Do *you* hear her?"

"No," I admitted. "She isn't talking to me."

"Do you *know* these people?"

"Oh, yes!" I cried, wishing passionately it was true. "Oh, yes!"

"And believe them?"

"Implicitly," I said.

"But she says that Bethie—who's Bethie?" He glanced around.

"She is," said Karen, nodding at Bethie.

"*She* is?" Dr. Curtis looked intently at the shy, lovely face. He shook his head wonderingly and turned back to me.

"Anyway, this one, Valancy, says Bethie can sense every condition in the child's body and that she will be able to tell all the injuries, their location and extent without X-rays! Without equipment!"

"Yes," I said. "If they say so."

"You would be willing to risk a child's life—"

"Yes," I said. "They know. They really do." And swallowed hard to keep down the fist of doubt that clenched in my chest.

"You believe they can *see* through flesh and bone?"

"Maybe not see," I said, wondering at my own words.

"But *know* with a knowledge that is sure and complete." I glanced, startled, at Karen. Her nod was very small but it told me where my words came from.

"Are *you* willing to trust these people?" The doctor turned to Abie's parents.

"They're *our* People," said Mr. Peters with quiet pride.

"I'd operate on him myself with a pickax if they said so."

"Of all the screwball deals . . . !" The doctor's hand rubbed across his face again. "I know I needed this vacation, but this is ridiculous!"

We all listened to the silence of the night and—at least I—to the drumming of anxious pulses until Dr. Curtis

sighed heavily.

"Okay, Valancy. I don't believe a word of it. At least I wouldn't if I were in my right mind, but you've got the terminology down pat as if you knew *something*. . . . Well, I'll do it. It's either that or let him die. And God have mercy on our souls!"

I couldn't bear the thought of shutting myself in with my own dark fears, so I walked back toward the school, hugging myself in my inadequate coat against the sudden sharp chill of the night. I wandered down to the grove, praying wordlessly, and on up to the school. But I couldn't go in. I shuddered away from the blank glint of the windows and turned back to the grove. There wasn't any more time or direction or light or anything familiar—only a confused cloud of anxiety and a final icy weariness that drove me back to Abie's house.

I stumbled into the kitchen, my stiff hands fumbling at the door knob. I huddled in a chair, gratefully leaning over the hot wood stove that flicked the semi-darkness of the big homey room with warm red light, trying to coax some feeling back into my fingers.

I drowsed as the warmth began to penetrate and then the door was flung open and slammed shut. The doctor leaned back against it, his hand still clutching the knob.

"Do you know what they did?" he cried, not so much to me as to himself. "What they made *me* do? Oh Lord!" He staggered over to the stove, stumbling over my feet. He collapsed by my chair, rocking his head between his hands. "They made me operate on his brain! *Repair* it. Trace circuits and rebuild them. *You can't do that!* It can't be done! Brain cells damaged can't be repaired. No one can restore circuits that are destroyed! It can't be done. But I did it! *I did it!*"

I knelt beside him and tried to comfort him in the circle of my arms.

"There, there, there," I soothed.

He clung like a terrified child. "No anesthetics!" he cried. "*She* kept him asleep. And no bleeding when I went

through the scalp! *They* stopped it. And the impossible things I did with the few instruments I have with me! And the brain starting to mend right before my eyes! Nothing was right!"

"But nothing was wrong," I murmured. "Abie will be all right, won't he?"

"How do I know?" he shouted suddenly, pushing away from me. "I don't know anything about a thing like this. I put his brain back together and he's still breathing, but how do I know!"

"There, there," I soothed. "It's over now."

"It'll never be over!" With an effort he calmed himself and we helped one another up from the floor. "You can't forget a thing like this in a life time."

"We can give you forgetting," said Valancy softly from the door. "If you *want* to forget. We can send you back to the Tumble A with no memory of tonight except a pleasant visit to Bendo."

"You can?" He turned speculative eyes toward her. "You can." He amended his words to a statement.

"Do you want to forget?" asked Valancy.

"Of course not," he snapped. Then, "I'm sorry. It's just that I don't often work miracles in the wilderness. But if I did it once, maybe—"

"Then you understand what you did?" asked Valancy, smiling.

"Well, no, but if I could—if you would . . . There must be some way—"

"Yes," said Valancy, "But you'd have to have a Sensitive working with you and Bethie is It as far as Sensitives go right now."

"You mean it's true what I saw—what you told me about the—The Home? You're extraterrestrials?"

"Yes," sighed Valancy. "At least our grandparents were." Then she smiled. "But we're learning where we can fit into this world. Some day—some day we'll be able—" She changed the subject abruptly.

"You realize, of course, Dr. Curtis, that we'd rather you wouldn't discuss Bendo or us with anyone else. We would

rather be just people to Outsiders."

He laughed shortly, "Would I be believed if I did?"

"Maybe no, maybe so," said Valancy. "Maybe only enough to start people nosing around. And that would be too much. We have a bad situation here and it will take a long time to erase—" and her voice slipped into silence and I knew she had dropped into thoughts to brief him on the local problem. How long is a thought? How fast can you think of Hell—and Heaven? It was that long before the doctor blinked and drew a shaky breath.

"Yes," he said. "A long time."

"If you like," said Valancy, "I can block your ability to talk of us."

"Nothing doing!" snapped the doctor. "I can manage my own censorship, thanks."

Valancy flushed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be condescending."

"You weren't," said the doctor. "I'm just on the prod tonight. It has been *A Day*, and that's for sure!"

"Hasn't it though?" I smiled, and then, astonished, rubbed my cheeks because tears had begun to spill down my face. I laughed, embarrassed, and couldn't stop. My laughter turned suddenly to sobs and I was bitterly ashamed to hear myself wailing like a child. I clung to Valancy's strong hands until I suddenly slid into a warm welcome darkness that had no thinking or fearing or need for believing in anything outrageous, but only in sleep.

It was a magic year and it fled on impossibly fast wings, the holidays flicking past like telephone poles by a railroad. Christmas was especially magic because my angels actually flew and the Glory actually shone round about because their robes had hems woven of sunlight—I watched the girls weave them. And Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, complete with cardboard antlers that wouldn't stay straight, really took off and circled the room. And as our Mary and Joseph leaned raptly over the Manger, their faces solemn and intent on the Miracle, I felt suddenly that they were really seeing, really kneeling beside the

Manger in Bethlehem.

Anyway, the months fled, and the blossoming of Bendo was beautiful to see. There was laughter and frolicking and even the houses grew subtly into color. Green things crept out where only rocks had been before and a tiny tentative stream of water had begun to flow down the creek again. They explained to me that they had to take it slow because people might wonder if the creek filled overnight! Even the rough steps up to the houses were being overgrown because they were so seldom used, and I was becoming accustomed to seeing my pupils coming to school like a bevy of bright birds, playing tag in the treetops. I was surprised at myself for adjusting so easily to all the incredible things done around me by The People, and I was pleased that they accepted me so completely. But I always felt a pang when the children escorted me home—with me, they had to walk.

But all things have to end, and I sat one May afternoon, staring into my top desk drawer, the last to be cleaned out, wondering what to do with the accumulation of useless things in it. But I wasn't really seeing the contents of the drawer, I was concentrating on the great weary emptiness that pressed my shoulders down and weighted my mind. "It's not fair," I muttered aloud and illogically, "to show me Heaven and then snatch it away."

"That's about what happened to Moses, too, you know."

My surprised start spilled an assortment of paper clips and thumb tacks from the battered box I had just picked up.

"Well forevermore!" I said, righting the box. "Dr. Curtis! What are you doing here?"

"Returning to the scene of my crime," he smiled, coming through the open door. "Can't keep my mind off Abie. Can't believe he recovered from all that . . . shall we call it repair work? I have to check him every time I'm anywhere near this part of the country—and I still can't believe it."

"But he has."

"He has for sure! I had to fish him down from a treetop

to look him over—" The doctor shuddered dramatically and laughed. "To see him hurtling down from the top of that tree curdled my blood! But there's hardly even a visible scar left."

"I know," I said, jabbing my finger as I started to gather up the tacks. "I looked last night. I'm leaving tomorrow, you know." I kept my eyes resolutely down to the job at hand. "I have this last straightening up to do."

"It's hard, isn't it?" he said and we both knew he wasn't talking about straightening up.

"Yes," I said soberly. "Awfully hard. Earth gets heavier every day."

"I find it so lately, too," he said. "But at least you have the satisfaction of knowing that you—"

I moved uncomfortably and laughed.

"Well, they do say: Those as can, do; those as can't, teach."

"Umm," said the doctor noncommittally, but I could feel his eyes on my averted face and I swiveled away from him, groping for a better box to put the clips in.

"Going to summer school?" His voice came from near the windows.

"No," I sniffed cautiously. "No, I swore when I got my Master's that I was through with education—at least the kind that's come-every-day-and-learn-something."

"Hmml!" There was amusement in the doctor's voice. "Too bad," he said. "I'm going to school this summer. Thought you might like to go there, too."

"Where?" I asked bewildered, finally looking at him.

"Cougar Canyon Summer School," he smiled. "Most exclusive."

"Cougar Canyon! Why that's where Karen—"

"Exactly," he said. "That's where the other Group is established. I just came from there. Karen and Valancy want us both to come. Do you object to being an experiment?"

"Why, no—" I cried—and then, cautiously, "What kind of an experiment?" Visions of brains being carved up swam through my mind.

The doctor laughed. "Nothing as gruesome as you're imagining, probably." Then he sobered and sat on the edge of my desk. "I've been to Cougar Canyon a couple of times, trying to figure out some way to get Bethie to help me when I come up against a case that's a puzzler. Valancy and Karen want to try a period of training with Outsiders—" he grimaced wryly "—that's us—to see how much of what *they* are can be transmitted by training. You know Bethie is half Outsider. Only her mother was of The People."

He was watching me intently.

"Yes," I said absently, my mind whirling, "Karen told me."

"Well, do you want to try it? Do you want to go?"

"Do I want to go!" I cried, scrambling the clips into a rubber band box. "How soon do we leave? Half an hour? Ten minutes? Did you leave the motor running?"

"Woops, woops!" The doctor took me by both arms and looked soberly into my eyes.

"We can't set our hopes too high," he said quietly. "It may be that for such knowledge we aren't teachable—"

I looked soberly back at him, my heart crying in fear that it might be so.

"Look," I said slowly. "If you had a hunger, a great big gnawing-inside hunger and no money and you saw a bakery shop window—which would you do? Turn your back on it? Or would you press your nose as close as you could against the glass and let at least your eyes feast? I know what *I'd* do." I reached for my sweater.

"And, you know, you never can tell. The shop door might open a crack, maybe—someday . . ."

NOBODY BOTHERS GUS

by
Algis Budrys

Budrys is another boy who gives me trouble. He came into the science-fantasy field four years or so ago as a very young man with a very big talent. In the intervening years, I watched him—as I thought—trade that talent for a mess of wordage. He wrote prolifically, but seldom at his best.

He is still prolific; but his work in 1955 reached and maintained a consistent high level that puts him easily in a class with the best writers in the field today. Selecting just one story to include here was difficult. I chose Gus, finally, because it is the only story of a superman that I have found personally convincing since I read Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John," more years ago than I care to mention.

Two years earlier, Gus Kusevic had been driving slowly down the narrow back road into Boonesboro.

It was good country for slow driving, particularly in the late spring. There was nobody else on the road. The woods were just blooming into a deep, rich green as yet unburned by summer, and the afternoons were still cool and fresh. And, just before he reached the Boonesboro town line, he saw the locked and weathered cottage standing for sale on its quarter-acre lot.

He had pulled his roadcar up to a gentle stop, swung sideways in his seat, and looked at it.

This story originally appeared, in the magazine version, under the pseudonym, "Paul Janvier."

It needed paint; the siding had gone from white to gray, and the trim was faded. There were shingles missing here and there from the roof, leaving squares of darkness on the sun-bleached rows of cedar, and inevitably, some of the windowpanes had cracked. But the frame hadn't slouched out of square, and the roof hadn't sagged. The chimney stood up straight.

He looked at the straggled clumps and windrowed hay that were all that remained of the shrubbery and the lawn. His broad, homely face bunched itself into a quiet smile along its well-worn seams. His hands itched for the feel of a spade.

He got out of the roadcar, walked across the road and up to the cottage door, and copied down the name of the real estate dealer listed on the card tacked to the door-frame.

Now it was almost two years later, early in April, and Gus was top-dressing his lawn.

Earlier in the day he'd set up a screen beside the pile of topsoil behind his house, shoveled the soil through the screen, mixed it with broken peat moss, and carted it out to the lawn, where he left it in small piles. Now he was carefully raking it out over the young grass in a thin layer that covered only the roots, and let the blades peep through. He intended to be finished by the time the second half of the Giants-Kodiaks doubleheader came on. He particularly wanted to see it because Halsey was pitching for the Kodiaks, and he had something of an avuncular interest in Halsey.

He worked without waste motion or excess expenditure of energy. Once or twice he stopped and had a beer in the shade of the rose arbor he'd put up around the front door. Nevertheless, the sun was hot; by early afternoon, he had his shirt off.

Just before he would have been finished, a battered flivver settled down in front of the house. It parked with a flurry of its rotors, and a gangling man in a worn serge suit, with thin hair plastered across his tight scalp, climbed

out and looked at Gus uncertainly.

Gus had glanced up briefly while the flivver was on its silent way down. He'd made out the barely-legible "Falmouth County Clerk's Office" lettered over the faded paint on its door, shrugged, and gone on with what he was doing.

Gus was a big man. His shoulders were heavy and broad; his chest was deep, grizzled with thick, iron-gray hair. His stomach had gotten a little heavier with the years, but the muscles were still there under the layer of flesh. His upper arms were thicker than a good many thighs, and his forearms were enormous.

His face was seamed by a network of folds and creases. His flat cheeks were marked out by two deep furrows that ran from the sides of his bent nose, merged with the creases bracketing his wide lips, and converged toward the blunt point of his jaw. His pale blue eyes twinkled above high cheekbones which were covered with wrinkles. His close-cropped hair was as white as cotton.

Only repeated and annoying exposure would give his body a tan, but his face was permanently browned. The pink of his body sunburn was broken in several places by white scar tissue. The thin line of a knife cut emerged from the tops of his pants and faded out across the right side of his stomach. The other significant area of scarring lay across the uneven knuckles of his heavy-fingered hands.

The clerk looked at the mailbox to make sure of the name, checking it against an envelope he was holding in one hand. He stopped and looked at Gus again, mysteriously nervous.

Gus abruptly realized that he probably didn't present a reassuring appearance. With all the screening and raking he'd been doing, there'd been a lot of dust in the air. Mixed with perspiration, it was all over his face, chest, arms, and back. Gus knew he didn't look very gentle even at his cleanest and best-dressed. At the moment, he couldn't blame the clerk for being skittish.

He tried to smile disarmingly.

The clerk ran his tongue over his lips, cleared his throat with a slight cough, and jerked his head toward the mail-

box. "Is that right? You Mr. Kusevic?"

Gus nodded. "That's right. What can I do for you?"

The clerk held up the envelope. "Got a notice here from the County Council," he muttered, but he was obviously much more taken up by his effort to equate Gus with the rose arbor, the neatly edged and carefully tended flower beds, the hedges, the flagstoned walk, the small goldfish pond under the willow tree, the white-painted cottage with its window boxes and bright shutters, and the curtains showing inside the sparkling windows.

Gus waited until the man was through with his obvious thoughts, but something deep inside him sighed quietly. He had gone through this moment of bewilderment with so many other people that he was quite accustomed to it, but that is not the same thing as being oblivious.

"Well, come on inside," he said after a decent interval. "It's pretty hot out here, and I've got some beer in the cooler."

The clerk hesitated again. "Well, all I've got to do is deliver this notice—" he said, still looking around. "Got the place fixed up real nice, don't you?"

Gus smiled. "It's my home. A man likes to live in a nice place. In a hurry?"

The clerk seemed to be troubled by something in what Gus had said. Then he looked up suddenly, obviously just realizing he'd been asked a direct question. "Huh?"

"You're not in any hurry, are you? Come on in; have a beer. Nobody's expected to be a ball of fire on a spring afternoon."

The clerk grinned uneasily. "No . . . nope, guess not." He brightened. "O.K.! Don't mind if I do."

Gus ushered him into the house, grinning with pleasure. Nobody'd seen the inside of the place since he'd fixed it up; the clerk was the first visitor he'd had since moving in. There weren't even any delivery men; Boonesboro was so small you had to drive in for your own shopping. There wasn't any mail carrier service, of course—not that Gus ever received any mail.

He showed the clerk into the living room. "Have a seat. I'll be right back." He went quickly out to the kitchen, took some beer out of the cooler, loaded a tray with glasses, a bowl of chips and pretzels, and the beer, and carried it out.

The clerk was up, looking around the library that covered two of the living room walls.

Looking at his expression, Gus realized with genuine regret that the man wasn't the kind to doubt whether an obvious clod like Kusevic had read any of this stuff. A man like that could still be talked to, once the original misconceptions were knocked down. No, the clerk was too plainly mystified that a grown man would fool with books. Particularly a man like Gus; now, one of these kids that messed with college politics, that was something else. But a grown man oughtn't to act like that.

Gus saw it had been a mistake to expect anything of the clerk. He should have known better, whether he was hungry for company or not. He'd *always* been hungry for company, and it was time he realized, once and for all, that he just plain wasn't going to find any.

He set the tray down on the table, uncapped a beer quickly, and handed it to the man.

"Thanks," the clerk mumbled. He took a swallow, sighed loudly, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He looked around the room again. "Cost you a lot to have all this put in?"

Gus shrugged. "Did most of it myself. Built the shelves and furniture; stuff like that. Some of the paintings I had to buy, and the books and records."

The clerk grunted. He seemed to be considerably ill at ease, probably because of the notice he'd brought, whatever it was. Gus found himself wondering what it could possibly be, but, now that he'd made the mistake of giving the man a beer, he had to wait politely until it was finished before he could ask.

He went over to the TV set. "Baseball fan?" he asked the clerk.

"Sure!"

"Giants-Kodiaks ought to be on." He switched the set on and pulled up a hassock, sitting on it so as not to get one of the chairs dirty. The clerk wandered over and stood looking at the screen, taking slow swallows of his beer.

The second game had started, and Halsey's familiar figure appeared on the screen as the set warmed up. The lithe young lefthander was throwing with his usual boneless motion, apparently not working hard at all, but the ball was whipping past the batters with a sizzle that the home plate microphone was picking up clearly.

Gus nodded toward Halsey. "He's quite a pitcher, isn't he?"

The clerk shrugged. "Guess so. Walker's their best man, though."

Gus sighed as he realized he'd forgotten himself again. The clerk wouldn't pay much attention to Halsey, naturally.

But he was getting a little irritated at the man, with his typical preconceptions of what was proper and what wasn't, of who had a right to grow roses and who didn't.

"Offhand," Gus said to the clerk, "could you tell me what Halsey's record was, last year?"

The clerk shrugged. "Couldn't tell you. Wasn't bad—I remember that much. 13-7, something like that."

Gus nodded to himself. "Uh-huh. How'd Walker do?"

"Walker! Why, man, Walker just won something like twenty-five games, that's all. And three no-hitters. How'd Walker do? Huh!"

Gus shook his head. "Walker's a good pitcher, all right—but he didn't pitch any no-hitters. And he only won eighteen games."

The clerk wrinkled his forehead. He opened his mouth to argue and then stopped. He looked like a sure-thing bettor who'd just realized that his memory had played him a trick.

"Say—I think you're right! Huh! Now what the Sam Hill made me think Walker was the guy? And you know

something—I've been talking about him all winter, and nobody once called me wrong?" The clerk scratched his head. "Now, *somebody* pitched them games! Who the dickens was it?" He scowled in concentration.

Gus silently watched Halsey strike out his third batter in a row, and his face wrinkled into a slow smile. Halsey was still young; just hitting his stride. He threw himself into the game with all the energy and enjoyment a man felt when he realized he was at his peak, and that, out there on the mound in the sun, he was as good as any man who ever had gone before him in this profession.

Gus wondered how soon Halsey would see the trap he'd set for himself.

Because it wasn't a contest. Not for Halsey. For Christy Mathewson, it had been a contest. For Lefty Grove and Dizzy Dean, for Bob Feller and Slat Gould, it had been a contest. But for Halsey it was just a complicated form of solitaire that always came out right.

Pretty soon, Halsey'd realize that you can't handicap yourself at solitaire. If you knew where all the cards are; if you knew that unless you deliberately cheated against yourself, you couldn't help but win—what good was it? One of these days, Halsey'd realize there wasn't a game on Earth he couldn't beat; whether it was a physical contest, organized and formally recognized as a game, or whether it was the billion-triggered pinball machine called Society.

What then, Halsey? What then? And if you find out, please, in the name of whatever kind of brotherhood we share, let me know.

The clerk grunted. "Well, it don't matter, I guess. I can always look it up in the record book at home."

Yes, you can, Gus commented silently. But you won't notice what it says, and, if you do, you'll forget it and never realize you've forgotten.

The clerk finished his beer, set it down on the tray, and was free to remember what he'd come here for. He looked around the room again, as though the memory were a cue of some kind.

"Lots of books," he commented.

Gus nodded, watching Halsey walk out to the pitcher's mound again.

"Uh . . . you read 'em all?"

Gus shook his head.

"How about that one by that Miller fellow? I hear that's a pretty good one."

So. The clerk had a certain narrow interest in certain aspects of certain kinds of literature.

"I suppose it is," Gus answered truthfully. "I read the first three pages, once." And, having done so, he'd known how the rest of it was going to go, who would do what when, and he'd lost interest. The library had been a mistake, just one of a dozen similar experiments. If he'd wanted an academic familiarity with human literature, he could just as easily have picked it up by browsing through bookstores, rather than buying the books and doing substantially the same thing at home. He couldn't hope to extract any emotional empathies, no matter what he did.

Face it, though; rows of even useless books were better than bare wall. The trappings of culture were a bulwark of sorts, even though it was a learned culture and not a *felt* one, and meant no more to him than the culture of the Incas. Try as he might, he could never be an Inca. Nor even a Maya or an Aztec, or any kind of kin, except by the most tenuous of extensions.

But he had no culture of his own. There was the thing; the emptiness that nevertheless ached; the rootlessness, the complete absence of a place to stand and say: "This is my own."

Halsey struck out the first batter in the inning with three pitches. Then he put a slow floater precisely where the next man could get the best part of his bat on it, and did not even look up as the ball screamed out of the park. He struck out the next two men with a total of eight pitches.

Gus shook his head slowly. That was the first symptom; when you didn't bother to be subtle about your handicapping any more.

The clerk held out the envelope. "Here," he said brusquely, having finally shilly-shallied his resolution up to the point of doing it despite his obvious nervousness at Gus' probable reaction.

Gus opened the envelope and read the notice. Then, just as the clerk had been doing, he looked around the room. A dark expression must have flickered over his face, because the clerk became even more hesitant. "I . . . I want you to know I regret this. I guess all of us do."

Gus nodded hastily. "Sure, sure." He stood up and looked out the front window. He smiled crookedly, looking at the top-dressing spread carefully over the painstakingly rolled lawn, which was slowly taking form on the plot where he had plowed last year and picked out pebbles, seeded and watered, shoveled topsoil, laid out flower beds . . . ah, there was no use going into that now. The whole plot, cottage and all, was condemned, and that was that.

"They're . . . they're turnin' the road into a twelve-lane freight highway," the clerk explained.

Gus nodded absently.

The clerk moved closer and dropped his voice. "Look—I was told to tell you this. Not in writin'." He sidled even closer, and actually looked around before he spoke. He laid his hand confidentially on Gus' bare forearm.

"Any price you ask for," he muttered, "fs gonna be O.K., as long as you don't get too greedy. The county isn't paying this bill. Not even the state, if you get what I mean."

Gus got what he meant. Twelve-lane highways aren't built by anything but national governments.

He got more than that. National governments don't work this way unless there's a good reason.

"Highway between Hollister and Farnham?" he asked.

The clerk paled. "Don't know for sure," he muttered.

Gus smiled thinly. Let the clerk wonder how he'd guessed. It couldn't be much of a secret, anyway—not after the grade was laid out and the purpose became self-evident. Besides, the clerk wouldn't wonder very long.

A streak of complete perversity shot through Gus. He

recognized its source in his anger at losing the cottage, but there was no reason why he shouldn't allow himself to cut loose.

"What's your name?" he asked the clerk abruptly.

"Uh . . . Harry Danvers."

"Well, Harry, suppose I told you I could stop that highway, if I wanted to? Suppose I told you that no bulldozer could get near this place without breaking down, that no shovel could dig this ground, that sticks of dynamite just plain wouldn't explode if they tried to blast? Suppose I told you that if they did put in the highway, it would turn soft as ice cream if I wanted it to, and run away like a river?"

"Huh?"

"Hand me your pen."

Danvers reached out mechanically and handed it to him. Gus put it between his palms and rolled it into a ball. He dropped it and caught it as it bounced up sharply from the soft, thick rug. He pulled it out between his fingers, and it returned to its cylindrical shape. He unscrewed the cap, flattened it out into a sheet between two fingers, scribbled on it, rolled it back into a cap, and, using his fingernail to draw out the ink which was now part of it, permanently inscribed Danvers' name just below the surface of the metal. Then he screwed the cap on again and handed the pen back to the county clerk. "Souvenir," he said.

The clerk looked down at it.

"Well?" Gus asked. "Aren't you curious about how I did it and what I am?"

The clerk shook his head. "Good trick. I guess you magician fellows must spend a lot of time practicing, huh? Can't say I could see myself spendin' that much working time on a hobby."

Gus nodded. "That's a good, sound, practical point of view," he said. Particularly when all of us automatically put out a field that damps curiosity, he thought. What point of view *could* you have?

He looked over the clerk's shoulder at the lawn, and one side of his mouth twisted sadly.

Only God can make a tree, he thought, looking at the shrubs and flower beds. Should we all, then, look for our challenge in landscape gardening? Should we become the gardeners of the rich humans in their expensive houses, driving up in our old, rusty trucks, oiling our lawnmowers, kneeling on the humans' lawns with our clipping shears, coming to the kitchen door to ask for a drink of water on a hot summer day?

The highway. Yes, he could stop the highway. Or make it go around him. There was no way of stopping the curiosity damper, no more than there was a way of willing his heart to stop, but it could be stepped up. He could force his mind to labor near overload, and no one would ever even *see* the cottage, the lawn, the rose arbor, or the battered old man, drinking his beer. Or rather, seeing them, would pay them absolutely no attention.

But the first time he went into town, or when he died, the field would be off, and then what? Then curiosity, then investigation, then, perhaps a fragment of theory here or there to be fitted to another somewhere else. And then what? Pogrom?

He shook his head. The humans couldn't win, and would lose monstrously. *That* was why he couldn't leave the humans a clue. He had no taste for slaughtering sheep, and he doubted if his fellows did.

His fellows. Gus stretched his mouth. The only one he could be sure of was Halsey. There had to be others, but there was no way of finding them. They provoked no reaction from the humans; they left no trail to follow. It was only if they showed themselves, like Halsey, that they could be seen. There was, unfortunately, no private telepathic party line among them.

He wondered if Halsey hoped someone would notice him and get in touch. He wondered if Halsey even suspected there were others like himself. He wondered if anyone had noticed *him*, when Gus Kusevic's name had been in the papers occasionally.

It's the dawn of my race, he thought. The first generation—or is it, and does it matter?—and I wonder where the females are.

He turned back to the clerk. "I want what I paid for the place," he said. "No more."

The clerk's eyes widened slightly, then relaxed, and he shrugged. "Suit yourself. But if it was me, I'd soak the government good."

Yes, Gus thought, you doubtless would. But I don't want to, because you simply don't take candy from babies.

So the superman packed his bags and got out of the human's way. Gus choked a silent laugh. The damping field. The damping-field. The thrice-cursed, ever-benevolent, foolproof, autonomic, protective damping field.

Evolution had, unfortunately, not yet realized that there was such a thing as human society. It produced a being with a certain modification from the human stock, thereby arriving at practical psi. In order to protect this feeble new species, whose members were so terribly sparse, it gave them the perfect camouflage.

Result: When young Augustin Kusevic was enrolled in school, it was discovered that he had no birth certificate. No hospital recalled his birth. As a matter of brutal fact, his human parents sometimes forgot his existence for days at a time.

Result: When young Gussie Kusevic tried to enter high school, it was discovered that he had never entered grammar school. No matter that he could quote teachers' names, textbooks, or classroom numbers. No matter if he could produce report cards. They were misfiled, and the anguished interviews forgotten. No one doubted his existence—people remembered the fact of his being, and the fact of his having acted and being acted upon. But only as though they had read it in some infinitely boring book.

He had no friends, no girl, no past, no present, no love. He had no place to stand. Had there been such things as ghosts, he would have found his fellowship there.

By the time of his adolescence, he had discovered an ab-

solute lack of involvement with the human race. He studied it, because it was the salient feature of his environment. He did not live with it. It said nothing to him that was of personal value; its motivations, morals, manners and morale did not find responsive reactions in him. And his, of course, made absolutely no impression on it.

The life of the peasant of ancient Babylon is of interest to only a few historical anthropologists, none of whom actually want to *be* Babylonian peasants.

Having solved the human social equation from his dispassionate viewpoint, and caring no more than the naturalist who finds that deer are extremely fond of green aspen leaves, he plunged into physical release. He discovered the thrill of picking fights and winning them; of *making* somebody pay attention to him by smashing his nose.

He might have become a permanent fixture on the Manhattan docks, if another longshoreman hadn't slashed him with a carton knife. The cultural demand on him had been plain. He'd had to kill the man.

That had been the end of unregulated personal combat. He discovered, not to his horror but to his disgust, that he could get away with murder. No investigation had been made; no search was attempted.

So that had been the end of that, but it had led him to the only possible evasion of the trap to which he had been born. Intellectual competition being meaningless, organized sports became the only answer. Simultaneously regulating his efforts and annotating them under a mound of journalistic record-keeping, they furnished the first official continuity his life had ever known. People still forgot his accomplishments, but when they turned to the records, his name was undeniably there. A dossier can be misfiled. School records can disappear. But something more than a damping field was required to shunt aside the mountain of news copy and statistics that drags, ball-like, at the ankle of even the mediocre athlete.

It seemed to Gus—and he thought of it a great deal—that this chain of progression was inevitable for any male of his kind. When, three years ago, he had discovered Halsey,

his hypothesis was bolstered. But what good was Halsey to another male? To hold mutual consolation sessions with? He had no intention of ever contacting the man.

The clerk cleared his throat. Gus jerked his head around to look at him, startled. He'd forgotten him.

"Well, guess I'll be going. Remember, you've only got two months."

Gus gestured noncommittally. The man had delivered his message. Why didn't he acknowledge he'd served his purpose, and go?

Gus smiled ruefully. What purpose did *homo nondescriptus* serve, and where was he going? Halsey was already walking downhill along the well-marked trail. *Were* there others? If so, then they were in another rut, somewhere, and not even the tops of their heads showed. He and his kind could recognize each other only by an elaborate process of elimination; they had to watch for the people no one noticed.

He opened the door for the clerk, saw the road, and found his thoughts back with the highway.

The highway would run from Hollister, which was a railroad junction, to the Air Force Base at Farnham, where his calculations in sociomathematics had long ago predicted the first starship would be constructed and launched. The trucks would rumble up the highway, feeding the open maw with men and material.

He cleaned his lips. Up there in space, somewhere; somewhere outside the Solar System, was another race. The imprint of their visits here was plain. The humans would encounter them, and again he could predict the result; the humans would win.

Gus Kusevic could not go along to investigate the challenges that he doubted lay among the stars. Even with scrapbooks full of notices and clippings, he had barely made his career penetrate the public consciousness. Halsey, who had exuberantly broken every baseball record in the books, was known as a "pretty fair country pitcher."

What credentials could he present with his application

to the Air Force? Who would remember them the next day if he had any? What would become of the records of his inoculations, his physical check-ups, his training courses? Who would remember to reserve a bunk for him, or stow supplies for him, or add his consumption to the total when the time came to allow for oxygen?

Stow away? Nothing easier. But, again; who would die so he could live within the tight lattice of shipboard economy? Which sheep would he slaughter, and to what useful purpose, in the last analysis?

"Well, so long," the clerk said.

"Good-by," Gus said.

The clerk walked down the flagstones and out to his flivver.

I think, Gus said to himself, it would have been much better for us if Evolution had been a little less protective and a little more thoughtful. An occasional pogrom wouldn't have done us any harm. A ghetto at least keeps the courtship problem solved.

Our seed has been spilt on the ground.

Suddenly, Gus ran forward, pushed by something he didn't care to name. He looked up through the flivver's open door, and the clerk looked down apprehensively.

"Danvers, you're a sports fan," Gus said hastily, realizing his voice was too urgent; that he was startling the clerk with his intensity.

"That's right," the clerk answered, pushing himself nervously back along the seat.

"Who's heavyweight champion of the world?"

"Mike Frazier. Why?"

"Who'd he beat for the title? Who used to be champion?"

The clerk pursed his lips. "Huh! It's been years— Gee, I don't know. I don't remember. I could look it up, I guess."

Gus exhaled slowly. He half-turned and looked back toward the cottage, the lawn, the flower beds, the walk, the arbor, and the fish pond under the willow tree. "Never

mind," he said, and walked back into the house while the clerk wobbled his flivver into the air.

The TV set was blaring with sound. He checked the status of the game.

It had gone quickly. Halsey had pitched a one-hitter so far, and the Giants' pitcher had done almost as well. The score was tied at 1-1, the Giants were at bat, and it was the last out in the ninth inning. The camera boomed in on Halsey's face.

Halsey looked at the batter with complete disinterest in his eyes, wound up, and threw the home-run ball.

THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER

by
E. C. Tubb

The last four stories have all dealt, in one way or another, with the idea that the solution to our problems may lie in changing ourselves. Perhaps the human race will develop, or evolve, or educate itself to new abilities and new levels of understanding, where we can better cope with the challenges we are now so busily constructing for ourselves.

E. C. Tubb, who is almost unknown in this country, but probably Britain's most popular writer of s-f, presents us with a world in which the changes have already happened. The painful period of growth has taken place; adjustment is achieved. Mankind lives well and happily—but too long.

HE AWOKE to the sound of roaring trumpets and lay for a while, hovering in that strange region between sleep and waking, clutching vainly at the broken fabric of shattered dreams as the once-bright images dissipated into tenuous clouds of dream-mist. Then he sighed, stirred, the trumpets dwindled to the musical attention call from the bedside videophone and, opening his eyes, he reached for the switch.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Melhuey?" The face pictured on the screen was smooth and pink, with liquid dark eyes and a gentle, understanding mouth. "Mr. John Melhuey?"

"That's right."

"This is the Bureau, Mr. Melhuey. We received a letter

from you this morning* with certain enclosures." The image shifted its eyes a little as it stared at something beyond the range of the scanners. "You realize, of course, what it is you ask?"

"I understand perfectly." John didn't trouble to hide his impatience. "Why are you calling?"

"Isn't that obvious, sir? There is always the possibility of mistake. Or perhaps . . ."

"There is no mistake and there is no perhaps about it. You have your instructions."

"Yes, sir. At your service, sir."

The image died as John opened the circuit, lingering for a brief second in fading brilliance before merging with the blank, pearly lustre of the screen. John stared at it for a moment, idly wondering what the man had thought and vaguely regretting the lost opportunity to ask questions, then he sighed and got out of bed.

It wasn't as easy as it had been yesterday, and yesterday had been harder than the day before. Stiff limbs and throbbing joints, odd twinges and dull aches, all foreign to his experience, all unwelcome symptoms of what was to come. Tiredly he entered the bathroom, stripped, and stood beneath the shower.

The water was hot, so hot that it steamed and stung his flesh into a pink glow. He revelled in it, letting it drum against his skull and run over his face, opening his mouth to the warm liquid then stooping so that it traced a tingling path down his back. He adjusted the flow to cold and shivered in the icy blast, his skin goose-pimpling and changing from pink to blue, dead white and unhealthy grey. Misery came with the cold, a chattering numbness then, as he spun the control back to hot, the relief was so great that he almost shouted with sheer animal-pleasure.

He had always enjoyed his morning shower.

Finished, he stood in the air-blast, staring at himself in the full-length mirror as he dried.

He had always been a big man in every sense of the word and now, physically at least, he was still big. Carefully he examined himself, from the wide-spread feet,

splayed a little now and with sagging arches, up the blue-mottled legs, the abdomen, bulging and lax, the thick waist, the chest heavy with fat where muscle should have stood in taut splendour, the neck with its loose skin and flabby tissue.

Old!

He stared at himself, his lips twisting a little with self-distaste, his deep-set eyes bitter as he touched the engraved lines from nose to mouth, the crow's feet marring once smooth skin, the receding hair and the wrinkled forehead. His skin bore the tiny marks of passing years, crinkled and crepe-like, too-soft and too-sagging, the muscles unable to restrain the tissue, the skin itself a too-big bag for what lay beneath.

Old!

Yesterday he hadn't seemed so bad and the day before yesterday he had been almost young. A week ago he had been fit and a month ago as virile as he had ever been. Now he was succumbing to age, losing the battle of the passing years with the passage of each hour, paying heavy penalty for his extended youth.

"You're worn out," he said to the image in the mirror. "Finished. Not even the drugs can help you now. You've lived a long time, longer than any man once had a right to expect, but you cannot live forever. Now, with medical science helpless to stave off old age, you're getting senile—fast!"

And it was true. Three times now he had passed his youth and virility only to have it restored by the longevity treatment. Three times—and there could be no fourth. Now he had to wait until he aged and died. Now he had to pay for extended youth by the accelerated advance of breakdown, the accumulated enemies of senility and old age. He had had a long, long summer. He had tasted life to the full, spreading his experiences across the years until now. Now was the last day of summer. Tomorrow was only winter, painful, degrading, bitter winter and bitter death.

He sighed as if bidding goodbye to what he had once been and could never be again then, with exaggerated care,

he dressed himself, taking a new suit from the dispenser, smiling as he snapped the seals and slipped the shimmering garments over his body.

He had always liked new clothes.

Breakfast was a work of art. Real fruit juice. Real coffee. Real bread toasted to a fragrant brown crispness and loaded with creamy yellow butter, the soft richness seeming to hold within itself all the trapped sunlight of bygone years. He ate slowly, moving the food over his palate, swallowing with careful deliberation, tasting the food instead of merely chewing it, savouring it as if he had never eaten before. The meal finished he rose and, with casual deliberation, moved about the huge room with its scattered treasures and its quiet, subtle, unmistakeable air of good taste.

A plaque of polished wood hung against the wall. A stone was mounted in the centre, a fragment of grey, crumbling rock and he stared at it, leaning forward to touch it and, as his fingers caressed the rough surface, time slipped and he was young again.

A grey plain, the hiss of oxygen and the chafing encumbrance of a suit. Sunlight, harsh and glaring through the shields, jagged peaks and, high in the star-shot sky, a swollen, green-mottled ball wreathed with the tenuous fingers of fleecy cloud.

Lunal

The rock had come from there, torn from where it had lain for uncounted years, wrenched free by a metal glove and carried as a trophy back to distant Earth. He had been the one to rip it from its bed. He had torn it free and stumbled, knee deep in luna dust, back to where the ship waited like a splinter of radiant steel in the savage light of a naked sun. Long ago now. Long, long ago. Back in his first youth when life was a gay adventure and death a mere word. How long?

He sighed as he thought about it, not trying to read the gold-letter date on the polished wood, letting his hand fall from the rough stone and, as he turned, the too-bright

memories scattered and vanished in the light of harsh reality.

A book lay on a small table, a single volume written by a man long dead, and yet containing within its pages the trapped gems of his genius, caught and safeguarded against time. It fell open as he picked it up, flattening at a favourite poem, and he scanned it, feeling a warm comfort in the familiar text.

*"From too much love of living, From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving, Whatever gods may be,
That no life lasts forever; That dead men rise up never;
That even the weariest river Winds somewhere safe to sea.*

He set it down, the warm comfort vanishing at the touch of chill dread, feeling a slight irritation where always before he had relished the swing and depth of the thought behind the words. Swinburne was not for him—not now.

He touched other books, scanned other volumes, all old friends, all holding for him some special grace, some captured memory. He read a story for the hundredth time and enjoyed it as if he had read it but once. He fingered worn bindings and yellowed pages, blinking as his eyes refused their duty until he had had a surfeit of reading and put away the books and sat, staring through the high windows at the late-afternoon sky beyond.

He felt restless. He felt impatient with a strange urgency as though he had much to do and little time in which to do it. Summer was nearly over and soon would come the bitter winter or . . .

He didn't let himself think about it.

He found a bottle, dusty and sealed, stained and bearing the arms of an emperor long dead. He held it against the light, staring at the golden glory imprisoned in the glass, caressing the bottle as if it was a thing infinitely precious, which it was, and priceless, which was almost true. He took a huge glass, a monstrous thing with a tiny stem and a balloon-like bowl. He warmed it between his palms, rolling it, nursing its delicate fragility; then, opening the bottle,

he poured out the lambent fluid and, still warming the glass, inhaled the ineffable fragrance of the rare old brandy.

He inhaled and sipped, inhaled and sipped again, feeling little fires light in his stomach and warm his chilling flesh with the magic of the grape and summer suns of distant memory.

"I wonder often what the vintners buy One half so precious as the stuff they sell." He smiled as he murmured the lines, the brandy in the glass seeming to wink at him with reflected light, smiling with its golden face and gurgling with its liquid mouth in complete agreement with the philosophy of the Persian Poet.

"You're a snare," said John accusingly. "You are the one true magic of the ages, the single thing which, by illusion, can turn terror into pleasure, hate into love, despair into hope. You can make all men brothers, all worries as drifting dreams, all hurt and pain as laughable memories. You hold the gift of courage. With you a man can face the world and be undaunted. With you he can ever smile at . . ."

He swallowed, drained the glass and rose from the soft, form-fitting chair in which he sat.

A bowl of fruit stood on a table of glistening plastic, the colours cunningly fashioned in abstruse designs of convoluted shades. He picked a grape, a swollen mutation from the hydroponic gardens, and crushed it against his teeth, savouring the seedless pulp and the sharp, almost acid tang of the syrupy juice. He ate slowly, his fingers not reaching for another until the first had been enjoyed to the full then, as he stared at the darkening sky outside, left the fruit and moved towards the door.

He had always liked the city.

He had always liked the medley of noises, the traffic sounds, the hum of inaudible conversations, the droning and scuffling, the humming and scraping of millions of feet and millions of wheels as the life of the metropolis ebbed and flowed.

There was a little park he remembered, an oasis of green

and brown, of trees and flowers, of soft grass and winding paths among the steel and glass, the concrete and plastic of the city. Here little birds chirped their tuneless songs and the heavy scent of growing things filled the summer afternoon with heady fragrance and stately blossoms nodded with somnolent grace.

He spent a little time in the park.

There were some sculptures he had always admired, things of stone fashioned by hands long dust, holding within themselves the dreams and ideals of bygone ages, the figures staring with blank eyes as they had stared over the passing years and as they would stare for years to come.

He spent a while with the familiar shapes.

There was a street lined with garish signs and filled with the healthy, raucous, cheerfully independent voices of shouting men. A place of misty treasure and glowing illusion where flesh and blood puppets cavorted on stages and the beat of skin and the throb of brass brought a sense of reeking jungles and carnivorous beasts. Here emotions were released and bodies swayed to nerve-tingling rhythm while eyes widened and breath came fast and the pulse of blood rose until each cell and sinew tingled with the collapse of care.

He walked the street until his legs were tired.

He walked until the prickling between his shoulder blades had faded, until his anticipation had died, until despair and frustration rode with him like an invisible incubus and worry began to gnaw with its ten thousand teeth at the yielding fabric of his mind.

When?

He didn't know. He didn't want to know for there is some knowledge a man should not have, but . . . when?

Tiredly he made his way back to his apartment, walking slowly through the bright-lit streets, the sky a black bowl above his head and the scintillant trails of the ships hurling themselves from the spaceport dying like the sparks from a million fireworks against the faded stars.

When?

Now? Two minutes time? Tomorrow?

He hoped not tomorrow. He hoped that he wouldn't have another night of old-man's sleep in which the visions of his youth came to torment him on waking with bitter memories of what might have been. Not again the slow awakening, the rising, the horrible aging and sagging onrush of senility. Not tomorrow. Please God not tomorrow!

"If the thing is to do," he muttered, "'twere best that it be done soon."

For if it were not done soon then it might not be done at all. Human courage and human despair have their limitations and life, even twisted and bitter, hateful and painful—life can be sweet, even though the sweetness be of bitter aloes and dead sea dust.

And he was but human.

Reluctantly he pressed his thumb to the lock, feeling a last flash of hope as he stepped into the warm, softly lit interior then, as he realized the room was empty, felt the sagging onrush of despair.

Tomorrow would be too late.

Tomorrow he would have aged a little too much, would have lost his courage, would have discovered that today's unbearable was tomorrow's acceptable. He had seen it before. He had seen the broken, decrepit things that once had been bright-eyed men, strong and with the clear vision of youth, had seen them huddled in their shame as they strove to cling to a life which had become a nagging burden. Tomorrow he too could be like that, hoping against hope, running a futile race against time, senile, teetering on the edge of insanity, his fine co-ordination and trained reflexes lost beneath a welter of petty fears and niggling doubts.

Then death would be a hateful thing. Then the thought of oblivion would fill him with screaming dread and he would shrink, enjoying the pain that meant life, blind and deaf to sane counsel and the advice of intelligence.

A thing of which to be ashamed.

A thing which he had sworn he would never become—and yet? Was there still time?

The room was locked, empty, and he was alone and, looking around him, he knew that time was running out in more senses than one.

For this was the last day of his summer and he was still alive.

He sank into a chair, staring dully at the dark bowl of the sky beyond the high windows, not seeing the flash and glare of the slender ships as they rose toward space, not seeing the faded stars, the immensity of the universe, seeing only himself and what he would become. For a moment self-pity gnawed at his strength and almost he yielded to it, feeling the easy, emotionless tears of age blur his vision and sting his eyes. Then he recovered and stared about the glowing beauty of the room.

Here were his treasures and, in a sense, here was his life. Here were his memories, the little things, the trifles and yet each with its own association with the past. A statue, he reached for it and let his thumb travel with almost sensuous pleasure over the polished stone, a fragment hardly worth the price of a meal, and yet he had carried it with him for uncounted millions of miles. There a ring, a gift later returned, a gift which, if accepted would have changed the course of his entire life.

For a moment he felt the old pain, the shattering of cynicism and felt a faint regret that now, in this last day, he was alone.

And yet he would not have had it otherwise.

Loneliness was something he had lived with too long to fear now. And he could bear it until he died—if he died. The thought made him sweat, a thin film of glistening moisture over the too-soft skin, and his hand trembled a little as he reached for the bottle of rare old brandy. Death, something he had wanted, something he had paid for, something he had expected all day. Not natural death, that would come and its approach was a thing he dreaded and feared accompanied as it would be by accelerated senility and gibbering insanity. But clean, sweet, merciless death, unknown, immediate, a clean cutting off and a neat

finish.

The only way to avoid the winter.

He had arranged it and the Bureau of Euthanasia had never been known to fail. He had tasted the sights and sounds, the sensuous pleasures of good food and good wine, the sight of familiar scenes and the visiting of familiar places for what he had imagined to be the last time. He had ignored the assassin who would be watching his every move, discounting what must come until nerve and sinew could deny his knowledge no longer, until anticipation hovered on the verge of being replaced by fear, and the terrible dread of having to reaffirm his intention once the night had passed.

He knew that he could never do it again.

Liquid sunshine poured from the bottle into the swollen glass. Automatically he warmed it between his palms, unable to desecrate the fluid gold even in his extremity of emotion and, as he inhaled the glorious bouquet, he smiled as an artist might smile or as a man to whom has been given one of the rare pleasures of the earth.

He had always appreciated good wine.

He sipped, letting the nectar drift over his tongue and sting his palate with its familiar taste. He sipped again then, as the glass slipped from his fingers and oblivion came with time but for a single thought, he smiled.

The assassin had been something more than just a killer.

He had been a gentleman.

ONE ORDINARY DAY, WITH PEANUTS

by
Shirley Jackson

Shirley Jackson is a witch, she says. A white witch, I believe she claims. That's as may be; in this book she represents the forces of evil. All these other fellas, knocking themselves out, trying to figure What To Do About It All? and this Jackson comes along, takes a good look at the same messy situation, and says distinctly—and distinctively—

"Nuts!"

Peanuts, of course

MR. JOHN PHILIP JOHNSON shut his front door behind him and came down his front steps into the bright morning with a feeling that all was well with the world on this best of all days, and wasn't the sun warm and good, and didn't his shoes feel comfortable after the resoling, and he knew that he had undoubtedly chosen the precise very tie which belonged with the day and the sun and his comfortable feet, and, after all, wasn't the world just a wonderful place? In spite of the fact that he was a small man, and the tie was perhaps a shade vivid, Mr. Johnson irradiated this feeling of well-being as he came down the steps and onto the dirty sidewalk, and he smiled at people who passed him, and some of them even smiled back. He stopped at the newsstand on the corner and bought his paper, saying "Good morning" with real conviction to the man who sold him the paper and the two or three other people who were lucky enough to be buying papers when Mr. Johnson skipped up. He remembered to fill his pock-

ets with candy and peanuts, and then he set out to get himself uptown. He stopped in a flower shop and bought a carnation for his buttonhole, and stopped almost immediately afterward to give the carnation to a small child in a carriage, who looked at him dumbly, and then smiled, and Mr. Johnson smiled, and the child's mother looked at Mr. Johnson for a minute and then smiled too.

When he had gone several blocks uptown, Mr. Johnson cut across the avenue and went along a side street, chosen at random; he did not follow the same route every morning, but preferred to pursue his eventful way in wide detours, more like a puppy than a man intent upon business. It happened this morning that halfway down the block a moving van was parked, and the furniture from an upstairs apartment stood half on the sidewalk, half on the steps, while an amused group of people loitered, examining the scratches on the tables and the worn spots on the chairs, and a harassed woman, trying to watch a young child and the movers and the furniture all at the same time, gave the clear impression of endeavoring to shelter her private life from the people staring at her belongings. Mr. Johnson stopped, and for a moment joined the crowd, and then he came forward and, touching his hat civilly, said, "Perhaps I can keep an eye on your little boy for you?"

The woman turned and glared at him distrustfully, and Mr. Johnson added hastily, "We'll sit right here on the steps." He beckoned to the little boy, who hesitated and then responded agreeably to Mr. Johnson's genial smile. Mr. Johnson brought out a handful of peanuts from his pocket and sat on the steps with the boy, who at first refused the peanuts on the grounds that his mother did not allow him to accept food from strangers; Mr. Johnson said that probably his mother had not intended peanuts to be included, since elephants at the circus ate them, and the boy considered, and then agreed solemnly. They sat on the steps cracking peanuts in a comradely fashion, and Mr. Johnson said, "So you're moving?"

"Yep," said the boy.

"Where you going?"

"Vermont."

"Nice place. Plenty of snow there. Maple sugar, too; you like maple sugar?"

"Sure."

"Plenty of maple sugar in Vermont. You going to live on a farm?"

"Going to live with Grandpa."

"Grandpa like peanuts?"

"Sure."

"Ought to take him some," said Mr. Johnson, reaching into his pocket. "Just you and Mommy going?"

"Yep."

"Tell you what," Mr. Johnson said. "You take some peanuts to eat on the train."

The boy's mother, after glancing at them frequently, had seemingly decided that Mr. Johnson was trustworthy, because she had devoted herself wholeheartedly to seeing that the movers did not—what movers rarely do, but every housewife believes they will—crack a leg from her good table, or set a kitchen chair down on a lamp. Most of the furniture was loaded by now, and she was deep in that nervous stage when she knew there was something she had forgotten to pack—hidden away in the back of a closet somewhere, or left at a neighbor's and forgotten, or on the clothesline—and was trying to remember under stress what it was.

"This all, lady?" the chief mover said, completing her dismay.

Uncertainly, she nodded.

"Want to go on the truck with the furniture, sonny?" the mover asked the boy, and laughed. The boy laughed too and said to Mr. Johnson, "I guess I'll have a good time at Vermont."

"Fine time," said Mr. Johnson, and stood up. "Have one more peanut before you go," he said to the boy.

The boy's mother said to Mr. Johnson, "Thank you so much; it was a great help to me."

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Johnson gallantly. "Where

in Vermont are you going?"

The mother looked at the little boy accusingly, as though he had given away a secret of some importance, and said unwillingly, "Greenwich."

"Lovely town," said Mr. Johnson. He took out a card, and wrote a name on the back. "Very good friend of mine lives in Greenwich," he said. "Call on him for anything you need. His wife makes the best doughnuts in town," he added soberly to the little boy.

"Swell," said the little boy.

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He went on, stepping happily with his new-shod feet, feeling the warm sun on his back and on the top of his head. Halfway down the block he met a stray dog and fed him a peanut.

At the corner, where another wide avenue faced him, Mr. Johnson decided to go on uptown again. Moving with comparative laziness, he was passed on either side by people hurrying and frowning, and people brushed past him going the other way, clattering along to get somewhere quickly. Mr. Johnson stopped on every corner and waited patiently for the light to change, and he stepped out of the way of anyone who seemed to be in any particular hurry, but one young lady came too fast for him, and crashed wildly into him when he stooped to pat a kitten which had run out onto the sidewalk from an apartment house and was now unable to get back through the rushing feet.

"Excuse me," said the young lady, trying frantically to pick up Mr. Johnson and hurry on at the same time, "terribly sorry."

The kitten, regardless now of danger, raced back to its home; "Perfectly all right," said Mr. Johnson, adjusting himself carefully. "You seem to be in a hurry."

"Of course I'm in a hurry," said the young lady. "I'm late."

She was extremely cross and the frown between her eyes seemed well on its way to becoming permanent. She had obviously awakened late, because she had not spent any

extra time in making herself look pretty, and her dress was plain and unadorned with collar or brooch, and her lipstick was noticeably crooked. She tried to brush past Mr. Johnson, but, risking her suspicious displeasure, he took her arm and said, "Please wait."

"Look," she said ominously. "I ran into you and your lawyer can see my lawyer and I will gladly pay all damages and all inconveniences suffered therefrom but please this minute let me go because *I am late*."

"Late for what?" said Mr. Johnson; he tried his winning smile on her but it did no more than keep her, he suspected, from knocking him down again.

"Late for work," she said between her teeth. "Late for my employment. I have a job and if I am late I lose exactly so much an hour and I cannot really afford what your pleasant conversation is costing me, be it *ever* so pleasant."

"I'll pay for it," said Mr. Johnson. Now these were magic words, not necessarily because they were true, or because she seriously expected Mr. Johnson to pay for anything, but because Mr. Johnson's flat statement, obviously innocent of irony, could not be, coming from Mr. Johnson, anything but the statement of a responsible and truthful and respectable man.

"What *do* you mean?" she asked.

"I said that since I am obviously responsible for your being late I shall certainly pay for it."

"Don't be silly," she said, and for the first time the frown disappeared. "I wouldn't expect you to pay for anything—a few minutes ago I was offering to pay *you*. Anyway," she added, almost smiling, "*it was my fault*."

"What happens if you don't go to work?"

She stared. "I don't get paid."

"Precisely," said Mr. Johnson.

"What do you mean, precisely? If I don't show up at the office exactly twenty minutes ago I lose a dollar and twenty cents an hour, or two cents a minute or . . ." She thought, ". . . Almost a dime for the time I've spent talking to you."

Mr. Johnson laughed, and finally she laughed, too. "You're late already," he pointed out. "Will you give me

another four cents worth?"

"I don't understand why."

"You'll see," Mr. Johnson promised. He led her over to the side of the walk, next to the buildings, and said, "Stand here," and went out into the rush of people going both ways. Selecting and considering, as one who must make a choice involving perhaps whole years of lives, he estimated the people going by. Once he almost moved, and then at the last minute thought better of it and drew back. Finally, from half a block away, he saw what he wanted, and moved out into the center of the traffic to intercept a young man, who was hurrying, and dressed as though he had awakened late, and frowning.

"Oof," said the young man, because Mr. Johnson had thought of no better way to intercept anyone than the one the young woman had unwittingly used upon him. "Where do you think you're going?" the young man demanded from the sidewalk.

"I want to speak to you," said Mr. Johnson ominously.

The young man got up nervously, dusting himself and eyeing Mr. Johnson. "What for?" he said. "What'd I do?"

"That's what bothers me most about people nowadays," Mr. Johnson complained broadly to the people passing. "No matter whether they've done anything or not, they always figure someone's after them. About what you're going to do," he told the young man.

"Listen," said the young man, trying to brush past him, "I'm late, and I don't have any time to listen. Here's a dime, now get going."

"Thank you," said Mr. Johnson, pocketing the dime. "Look," he said, "what happens if you stop running?"

"I'm late," said the young man, still trying to get past Mr. Johnson, who was unexpectedly clinging.

"How much do you make an hour?" Mr. Johnson demanded.

"A communist, are you?" said the young man. "Now will you please let me—"

"No," said Mr. Johnson insistently, "*how much?*"

"Dollar fifty," said the young man. "And *now* will

you—"

"You like adventure?"

The young man stared, and, staring, found himself caught and held by Mr. Johnson's genial smile; he almost smiled back and then repressed it and made an effort to tear away. "I got to *hurry*," he said.

"Mystery? Like surprises? Unusual and exciting events?"

"You selling something?"

"Sure," said Mr. Johnson. "You want to take a chance?"

The young man hesitated, looked longingly up the avenue toward what might have been his destination and then, when Mr. Johnson said, "I'll pay for it," with his own peculiar and convincing emphasis, turned and said, "Well, okay. But I got to *see* it first, what I'm buying."

Mr. Johnston, breathing hard, led the young man over to the side where the girl was standing; she had been watching with interest Mr. Johnson's capture of the young man and now, smiling timidly, she looked at Mr. Johnson as though prepared to be surprised at nothing.

Mr. Johnson reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. "Here," he said, and handed a bill to the girl. "This about equals your day's pay."

"But no," she said, surprised in spite of herself. "I mean, I *couldn't*."

"Please do not interrupt," Mr. Johnson told her. "And *here*," he said to the young man, "this will take care of *you*." The young man accepted the bill dazedly, but said, "Probably counterfeit" to the young woman out of the side of his mouth. "Now," Mr. Johnson went on, disregarding the young man, "what is your name, miss?"

"Kent," she said helplessly. "Mildred Kent."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "And you, sir?"

"Arthur Adams," said the young man stiffly.

"Splendid," said Mr. Johnson. "Now, Miss Kent, I would like you to meet Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams, Miss Kent."

Miss Kent stared, wet her lips nervously, made a gesture as though she might run, and said, "How do you do?"

Mr. Adams straightened his shoulders, scowled at Mr.

Johnson, made a gesture as though he might run, and said, "How do you do?"

"Now *this*," said Mr. Johnson, taking several bills from his wallet, "should be enough for the day for both of you. I would suggest, perhaps, Coney Island—although I personally am not fond of the place—or perhaps a nice lunch somewhere, and dancing, or a matinee, or even a movie, although take care to choose a really *good* one; there are so many bad movies these days. You might," he said, struck with an inspiration, "visit the Bronx Zoo, or the Planetarium. Anywhere, as a matter of fact," he concluded, "that you would like to go. Have a nice time."

As he started to move away Arthur Adams, breaking from his dumbfounded stare, said, "But see here, mister, you *can't* do this. Why—how do you know—I mean, *we* don't even know—I mean, how do you know we won't just take the money and not do what you said?"

"You've taken the money," Mr. Johnson said. "You don't have to follow any of my suggestions. You may know something you prefer to do—perhaps a museum, or something."

"But suppose I just run away with it and leave her here?"

"I know you won't," said Mr. Johnson gently, "because you remembered to ask *me* that. Goodby," he added, and went on.

As he stepped up the street, conscious of the sun on his head and his good shoes, he heard from somewhere behind him the young man saying, "Look, you know you don't *have* to if you don't want to," and the girl saying, "But unless *you* don't want to . . ." Mr. Johnson smiled to himself and then thought that he had better hurry along; when he wanted to he could move very quickly, and before the young woman had gotten around to saying, "Well, *I* will if *you* will," Mr. Johnson was several blocks away and had already stopped twice, once to help a lady lift several large packages into a taxi and once to hand a peanut to a seagull. By this time he was in an area of large stores and many more people and he was buffeted constantly from either side by people hurrying and cross and late and sul-

len. Once he offered a peanut to a man who asked him for a dime, and once he offered a peanut to a bus driver who had stopped his bus at an intersection and had opened the window next to his seat and put out his head as though longing for fresh air and the comparative quiet of the traffic. The man wanting a dime took the peanut because Mr. Johnson had wrapped a dollar bill around it, but the bus driver took the peanut and asked ironically, "You want a transfer, Jack?"

On a busy corner Mr. Johnson encountered two young people—for one minute he thought they might be Mildred Kent and Arthur Adams—who were eagerly scanning a newspaper, their backs pressed against a storefront to avoid the people passing, their heads bent together. Mr. Johnson, whose curiosity was insatiable, leaned onto the storefront next to them and peeked over the man's shoulder; they were scanning the "Apartments Vacant" columns.

Mr. Johnson remembered the street where the woman and her little boy were going to Vermont and he tapped the man on the shoulder and said amiably, "Try down on West Seventeen. About the middle of the block, people moved out this morning."

"Say, what do you—" said the man, and then, seeing Mr. Johnson clearly, "Well, thanks. Where did you say?"

"West Seventeen," said Mr. Johnson. "About the middle of the block." He smiled again and said, "Good luck."

"Thanks," said the man.

"Thanks," said the girl, as they moved off.

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He lunched alone in a pleasant restaurant, where the food was rich, and only Mr. Johnson's excellent digestion could encompass two of their whipped-cream-and-chocolate-and-rum-cake pastries for dessert. He had three cups of coffee, tipped the waiter largely, and went out into the street again into the wonderful sunlight, his shoes still comfortable and fresh on his feet. Outside he found a beggar staring into the windows of the restaurant he had left and, carefully looking through the money in his pocket, Mr. Johnson approached the beggar and pressed

some coins and a couple of bills into his hand. "It's the price of the veal cutlet lunch plus tip," said Mr. Johnson. "Goodby."

After his lunch he rested; he walked into the nearest park and fed peanuts to the pigeons. It was late afternoon by the time he was ready to start back downtown, and he had refereed two checker games and watched a small boy and girl whose mother had fallen asleep and awakened with surprise and fear which turned to amusement when she saw Mr. Johnson. He had given away almost all of his candy, and had fed all the rest of his peanuts to the pigeons, and it was time to go home. Although the late afternoon sun was pleasant, and his shoes were still entirely comfortable, he decided to take a taxi downtown.

He had a difficult time catching a taxi, because he gave up the first three or four empty ones to people who seemed to need them more; finally, however, he stood alone on the corner and—almost like netting a frisky fish—he hailed desperately until he succeeded in catching a cab which had been proceeding with haste uptown and seemed to draw in towards Mr. Johnson against its own will.

"Mister," the cab driver said as Mr. Johnson climbed in, "I figured you was an omen, like. I wasn't going to pick you up at all."

"Kind of you," said Mr. Johnson ambiguously.

"If I'd of let you go it would of cost me ten bucks," said the driver.

"Really?" said Mr. Johnson.

"Yeah," said the driver. "Guy just got out of the cab, he turned around and give me ten bucks, said take this and bet it in a hurry on a horse named Vulcan, right away."

"Vulcan?" said Mr. Johnson, horrified. "A fire sign on a Wednesday?"

"What?" said the driver. "Anyway, I said to myself if I got no fare between here and there I'd bet the ten, but if anyone looked like they needed the cab I'd take it as a omen and I'd take the ten home to the wife."

"You were very right," said Mr. Johnson heartily. "This is Wednesday, you would have lost your money. Monday,

yes, or even Saturday. But never never never a fire sign on a Wednesday. Sunday would have been good, now."

"Vulcan don't run on Sunday," said the driver.

"You wait till another day," said Mr. Johnson. "Down this street, please, driver. I'll get off on the next corner."

"He *told* me Vulcan, though," said the driver.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Johnson, hesitating with the door of the cab half-open. "You take that ten dollars and I'll give you another ten dollars to go with it, and you go right-ahead and bet that money on any Thursday on any horse that has a name indicating . . . let me see, Thursday . . . well, grain. Or any growing food."

"Grain?" said the driver. "You mean a horse named, like, Wheat or something?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Johnson. "Or, as a matter of fact, to make it even easier, any horse whose name includes the letters C, R, L. Perfectly simple."

"Tall Corn?" said the driver, a light in his eye. "You mean a horse named, like, Tall Corn?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Johnson. "Here's your money."

"Tall Corn," said the driver. "Thank you, mister."

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He was on his own corner and went straight up to his apartment. He let himself in and called "Hello?" and Mrs. Johnson answered from the kitchen, "Hello, dear, aren't you early?"

"Took a taxi home," Mr. Johnson said. "I remembered the cheesecake, too. What's for dinner?"

Mrs. Johnson came out of the kitchen and kissed him; she was a comfortable woman, and smiling as Mr. Johnson smiled. "Hard day?" she asked.

"Not very," said Mr. Johnson, hanging his coat in the closet. "How about you?"

"So-so," she said. She stood in the kitchen doorway while he settled into his easy chair and took off his good shoes and took out the paper he had bought that morning. "Here and there," she said.

"I didn't do so badly," Mr. Johnson said. "Couple young people."

"Fine," she said. "I had a little nap this afternoon, took it easy most of the day. Went into a department store this morning and accused the woman next to me of shoplifting, and had the store detective pick her up. Sent three dogs to the pound—you know, the usual thing. Oh, and listen," she added, remembering.

"What?" asked Mr. Johnson.

"Well," she said, "I got onto a bus and asked the driver for a transfer, and when he helped someone else first I said that he was impertinent, and quarreled with him. And then I said why wasn't he in the army, and I said it loud enough for everyone to hear, and I took his number and I turned in a complaint. Probably got him fired."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "But you do look tired. Want to change over tomorrow?"

"I *would* like to," she said. "I could do with a change."

"Right," said Mr. Johnson. "What's for dinner?"

"Veal cutlet."

"Had it for lunch," said Mr. Johnson.

THE ETHICATORS

by

Willard Marsh

Miss Jackson, cheerfully convinced that there's no help for it anyhow, saw no need to investigate the backgrounds or genealogy of her Dei Sans Machina. Willard Marsh (whose name is new to s-f readers, but more familiar in the literary quarterlies) now goes into great detail about his very definitely Ex Machina Super-Busybodies.

THE MISSIONARIES came out of the planetary system of a star they didn't call Antares. They called it, naturally enough, The Sun—just as home was Earth, Terra, or simply The World. And naturally enough, being the ascendant animal on Earth, they called themselves human beings. They were looking for extraterrestrial souls to save.

They had no real hope of finding humans like themselves in this wondrously diversified universe. But it wasn't against all probability that, in their rummaging, there might not be a humanoid species to whom they could reach down a helping paw; some emergent cousin with at least a rudimentary symmetry from snout to tail, and hence a rudimentary soul.

The ship they chose was a compact scout, vaguely resembling the outside of an orange crate—except that they had no concept of an orange crate and, being a tesseract, it had no particular outside. It was simply an expanding cube (and as such, quite roomy) whose "interior" was always paralleling its "exterior" (or attempting to), in accordance with all the well-known basic and irrefutable

laws on the subject.

A number of its sides occupied the same place at the same time, giving a hypothetical spectator the illusion of looking down merging sets of railway tracks. This, in fact, was its precise method of locomotion. The inner cube was always having to catch up, caboose-fashion, with the outer one in time (or space, depending on one's perspective). And whenever it had done so, it would have arrived with itself—at approximately wherever in the space-time continuum it had been pointed.

When they felt the jar of the settling geodesics, the crew crowded at the forward visiplat to see where they were. It was the outskirts of a G type star system. Silently they watched the innermost planet float past, scorched and craggy, its sunward side seeming about to relapse to a molten state.

The Bosun-Colonel turned to the Conductor. "A bit of a disappointment I'm afraid, sir. Surely with all that heat . . . ?"

"Steady, lad. The last wicket's not been bowled." The Conductor's whiskers quivered in amusement at his next-in-command's impetuosity. "You'll notice that we're dropping downward. If the temperature accordingly continues dropping—"

He couldn't shrug, he wasn't physiologically capable of it, but it was apparent that he felt they'd soon reach a planet whose climate could support intelligent life.

If the Bosun-Colonel had any ideas that such directions as up and down were meaningless in space, he kept them to himself. As the second planet from its sun hove into view, he switched on the magniscan eagerly.

"I say, this is more like it. Clouds and all that sort of thing. Should we have a go at it, sir?"

The Conductor yawned. "Too bloody cloudy for my taste. Too equivocal. Let's push on," he said languidly. "I have a hunch the third planet might be just our dish of tea."

Quelling his disappointment, the Bosun-Colonel waited for the third planet to swim into being. And when it did,

blooming like an orchid in all its greens and moistnesses, he could scarcely contain his excitement.

"Why, it looks just like Earth," he marveled. "Gad, sir, what a master stroke of navigation. How did you realize this would be it?"

"Oh, I don't know," the Conductor said modestly. "Things usually have a habit of occurring in threes. I'm quite a student of numerology, you know." Then he remembered the Mission and drew himself erect on all his legs. "You may prepare for landing, Mister," he ordered crisply.

The Bosun-Colonel shifted over to manual and busied himself at the helm, luffing the square craft down the troughs of air. Gliding over the vast tropical oceans, he put down at a large land mass above a shallow warm sea, twenty-five degrees below the northern pole.

Too numbed for comment, the crew stared out at the alien vista. They'd heard of retarded life forms from other Missionary expeditions—of planets where the inhabitants, in extreme emergency, had been known to commit murder. But this was surely the worst, the most vicious imaginable in the galaxy.

Here, with life freshly up from the sea, freshly launched on the long climb to maturity and self-realization—was nothing but horror. With so lush a vegetation, so easily capable of supporting them side by side in abundance, the monsters were actually feeding on each other. Great lumbering beasts they were with their bristling hides and huge tails, charging between the giant tree ferns; gouging living chunks from one another while razor-toothed birds with scaly wings flapped overhead, screaming for the remnants. As the sounds of carnage came through the audio ports, the youngest Oarsman keeled over in a faint.

Even the Conductor was visibly shaken. The Bosun-Colonel turned to him with a sick expression.

"Surely it's a lost cause, Skipper. Life like this will never have a soul worth saving."

"Not in its present stage," the Old Man was forced to agree. "Still, one never knows the devious paths that evo-

lution takes." He considered the scene for a thoughtful, shuddering interval. "Perhaps in several thousand millenniums . . ."

The Bosun-Colonel tried to visualize the possibility of Ethical Life ever materializing through these swamp mists, but the logic against it was too insurmountable for the imagination.

"Even so," he conceded, "granting the impossible—whatever shape it took, the only worthwhile species would still be . . ." He couldn't bring himself to say it.

"Meat-eaters," the Conductor supplied grimly.

On hearing this, the Oarsman who had just revived promptly fainted again.

"It's too deep in the genes," the Conductor continued, "too far advanced for us to tamper with. All we can hope to do is modify their moral outlook. So that by the time they achieve star travel, they'll at least have a basic sense of Fair Play."

Sighing, bowed by responsibilities incommensurate with his chronological youth, he gave the order wearily. It was snapped down the chain of command to the Senior Yardbird:

"All paws stand by to lower the Ethics Ray! Step lively, lads—bugger off, now . . ."

There was a din of activity as the outer locks were opened and the bulky mechanism was shipped over the side. It squatted on a cleared rise of ground in all its complex, softly ticking majesty, waiting for the First Human to pad within range of its shedding Grace and Uplift. The work party scrambled back to the ship, anxious to be off this sinister terrain. Once more the crew gathered at the visiplat as the planet fell away beneath them, the Ethics Ray winking in the day's last light like a cornerstone. Or perhaps a tambourine .

Night closed down on the raw chaotic world, huge beasts closed in on the strange star-fallen souvenir. They snuffed over it; then enraged at discovering it was nothing they could fill their clamoring mindless stomachs with, at-

tempted to wreck it. They were unsuccessful, for the Machine had been given an extra heavy coat of shellac and things to withstand such monkeyshines. And the Machine, in its own finely calibrated way, ignored its harassers, for they had no resemblance to the Life it had been tuned to influence.

Days lengthened into decades, eons. The seas came shouldering in to stand towers tall above the Ethics Ray, lost in the far ooze below. Then even the seas receded, and the mountains buckled upward in their place, their arrogant stone faces staring changelessly across the epochs. Until they too were whittled down by erosion. The ice caps crept down, crackling and grinding the valleys. The ground stretched and tossed like a restless sleeper, settled, and the Ethics Ray was brought to light once more.

As it always had, it continued beaming its particular signal, on a cosmic ray carrier modulated by a pulse a particular number of angstroms below infrared. The beasts that blundered within its field were entirely different now, but they still weren't the Right Ones. Among them were some shambling pale bipeds, dressed in skins of other beasts, who clucked over its gleaming exterior and tried to chip it away for spearheads. In this of course they were unsuccessful.

And then one day the First Human wandered by, paused square in the path of the beam. His physiology was only approximate, his I.Q. was regrettably low—but he was Pre-Moral Life, such as it was, on this planet.

The Ethics Ray made the necessary frequency adjustments, tripped on full force. The Primitive froze under the bombardment, its germ plasm shifting in the most minute and subtle dimensions. Then, its mission fulfilled, the Ethics Ray collapsed into heavy molecules and sank into the ground. The first convert raced away in fright, having no idea what had happened. Neither did his billion sons and daughters . . .

Back on the home base, the Conductor reported in at the Ethication of Primitive Planets office. It was a magnifi-

cently imposing building, as befitting the moral seat of the universe. And the Overseer was an equally imposing human with ears greyed by service. His congratulations were unreserved.

"A splendid mission, lad," he said, "and I don't mind suggesting—strictly *entre nous*—that it could jolly well result in a Fleet Conductorship for you."

The Conductor was overwhelmed.

"Now just let me jot down the essentials while they're still fresh in mind," he continued, pawing through a desk drawer. "Botheration! I seem to have traded the last of my styluses. Do you happen to have one on you?"

"With pleasure." The Conductor handed over his monogrammed gold stylus, receiving in exchange a toy silence-maker.

"My youngster traded it to me this morning," the Overseer chuckled.

He wrote rapidly for several moment, then gave the stylus back. The Conductor found a weathered paper-weight in his rear pocket, which he traded him for it. It looked like it might have come from this very desk at one time. Then with a smart salute, he about-faced.

On the way out, a pair of secretaries paused in their trading of a pelt brush for a tail-curler to watch him admiringly. As well they might. Fleet Conductor!

The future Fleet Conductor of a solar system he would never think of calling Antares paused at the door. In its polished panel he regarded himself with due appreciation. He had sown the seeds of civilization on a far-flung planet where, countless light years from now, they would flower to maturity. Not among the strongest or cleverest species, to be sure, but among those most worthy of applying First Principles, the moral law of give and take.

Among those remote cousins of the Conductor himself—who under no circumstances would ever think of himself as resembling a rather oversized trader rat.

BIRDS CAN'T COUNT

by

Mildred Clingerman

If we went sailing off through the sky to somebody else's planet, you may depend upon it, every one who went would have a different purpose in mind. There'd be conquerors and colonists and missionaries and (by the millions, sooner or later) tourists.

Mrs. Clingerman suggests that extra-terrestrial visitors on Earth might also have mixed motives . . .

EVERYBODY has his own way of weathering a hangover. Maggie's husband's way was to ignore the whole matter, stoutly denying, if pressed, that he suffered at all. Maggie never denied Mark the right to this brave pretense, but she had long ago noted that on such days the family car needed a great deal of tinkering with, which necessitated Mark's lying down under it or in it for several hours. Maggie refused any such face-saving measures. Right after breakfast on the day after the party she took to her bed, fortified with massive doses of B₁, a dull book and, for quiet companionship, Gomez, the cat.

The window cooler hummed invitingly in the darkened bedroom; the curtains belled out in the breeze, and Maggie, shedding everything but her slip, climbed gratefully into bed. The book was called *Hunting Our Feathered Friends With a Camera*, and Maggie, who knew nothing of photography or birds, began to read it in the hope of being bored into sudden sleep.

Sleep had been very elusive lately. It was silly of her to

become so disturbed over shadows . . . or, more often, the lack of shadows. But how to explain her uneasiness to Mark, or to anybody? Once, last night at the party, she'd come very close to asking her friends for help or, maybe, just sympathy—the talk had turned to ghosts and hauntings—but luckily she'd called back the words before they'd formed. The whole thing was too nebulous to talk about. From the first, Mark had labeled it paranoiac, laughing at her wide-eyed account of *something* that looked at her in the bathroom, trundled after her to the bedroom, then watched her in the kitchen while she pared potatoes. When Mark had asked where for pete's sake was there room in that small kitchen for a secret watcher, Maggie had shut up. Not for worlds would she leave herself open to Mark's delighted shouts (she could just hear him) by answering that question.

"If I'd said: 'on top of the refrigerator,'" Maggie thought drowsily, "I'd never have heard the last of it."

. . . The hunting urge is deeply ingrained in man. It is no longer necessary to hunt for food; take a camera in your hands and stalk your prey. The prime hunter, anyway, from the days of the caveman, has been the artist, tracking down and recording beauty. . . . Allow your children and yourself the thrill of the chase; satisfy this primitive urge with a safe weapon, the camera. Patience . . . do not harm the nests . . . natural setting . . . build yourself a blind . . . patience . . . catch them feeding . . . mating . . . battling . . . patience . . . quick exposure . . . patience . . .

Maggie slept

Minutes later she woke to find Gomez, the cat, sitting on her stomach. She and Gomez, good friends, regarded each other gravely. Gomez, aware that he had her full attention, tossed his head skittishly.

"You woke me," Maggie accused.

"Mmm-ow-rannkk?" He was giving her the three-syllable, get-up-and-feed-me treatment. Maggie was supposed to find this coaxing irresistible.

"Blast and damn," Maggie said gently, not moving. Gomez trod heavily towards her chin.

"All *right*," Maggie muttered. "But stop flouncing. Who ever heard of a flouncing tomcat—"

Both Maggie and Gomez froze, staring at something close to the ceiling.

"Do you see it, too?" Maggie rolled her eyes at Gomez, which so terrified him he immediately began evasive action—bounding off the bed, stumbling over her shoes, caroming off her desk, falling into the lid of her portable typewriter, his favorite sleeping spot. Gomez cowered deep in the lid, one scalloped ear doing radar duty for whatever danger hovered.

"That's my brave, contained cat," Maggie crooned through her teeth. She raised herself up on her elbows to stare at one corner of the ceiling; her eyes moved slowly with the slow movement there. But was it movement? Strictly speaking, it was not. Only some subtle shifting of the light in the room, she thought. That was all. The ceiling was blank and bare. Gradually the tumult of her heart subsided. Maggie caught sight of her face in the dressing table mirror. She was interestingly pale.

"It's all done with mirrors, Gomez, and who's afraid of a mirror? Neither you nor I . . . a car went by, or a cloud. Take one cloud, a mirror, and a hangover; divide by . . . Wait a minute. I just thought of something."

Gomez waited, relaxing somewhat in his tight-fitting box. Maggie sat cross-legged in the middle of the double bed silently pursuing an elusive memory.

White face . . . tents . . . carnival . . . yes, the spider lady! It was one of the first dates I had with Mark, and how much I impressed him, because I saw through the illusion at once. There in the tent, behind a roped-off section, sat a huge, hairy spider with the head of a woman. The head turned and talked and laughed with the crowd, but glared at me when I began to point out to Mark the arrangement of the mirrors. It was all simple enough and fairly obvious, but not to Mark. Not to most people. Later, over coffee and doughnuts, I explained rather proudly to him that magic shows, pickpocket shows, that kind of thing, were always dull for me, because I could see so clearly what was

really happening—that the way to look, to watch, was not straight on, but in a funny kind of oblique way, head tilted. Mark squeezed my hand then and made some remark about a crazy female who goes through life with her head on one side, seeing too deeply into things. . . .

It is nice to remember young love, Maggie thought, but I'm losing the track of that thought. Oh, yes . . . and then during the war there was the General at Mark's basic training camp—he definitely lacked my peculiar ability—who came to check on the trainees' camouflaged foxholes. Mark wrote me about it. The old boy cursed them all for inept idiots who couldn't decently camouflage a flea, and then, right in front of the whole company and still cursing the obviousness of their efforts, stepped straight into one of the concealed holes and broke his leg. So . . . ?

Maggie lay back on her bed, her usual abstracted look considerably deepened. Her mind wheeled around to the party last night. Something said or done then nagged at her now. What was it? It had been a good party. Nobody mad or sad or very bad. The summer bachelor had flitted about like an overweight hummingbird stealing sips of kisses . . . and almost drowned in the blonde, bless her. A mercurial young man had explained to Maggie what a bitch his first wife was, while staring rather gloomily at his second. The talk had ranged from ghosts to sex, from religion to sex, from flying saucers to sex, and everybody had come out strongly on the side of the angels and sex. The rocket engineer believed passionately in the flying saucers, but—*that was it!*

He'd said: "Maggie, it's silly and sweet of you to hope for a *deus ex machina*, come to save civilization, but have you considered we may mean nothing to them emotionally? Haven't you ever watched ants struggling with a load too big for them? How much did you care? Even if, like God, you marked the fall of every sparrow, you might simply be conducting a survey or expressing colossal boredom, like the people who delight in measuring things. You know what I mean—if so and so were laid end to end . . ." And right there the talk had turned back to sex.

"So," Maggie said aloud, "I'm being watched. Cataloged. Maybe photographed. Either that, or I'm nuts, loony, strictly for the birds." She grabbed the dull book and began to read again, not quite sure what she was looking for. She studied the photographs in the book, and for the first time it struck her how self-consciously posed some of the birds looked. "Hams," Maggie dismissed them. "Camera hogs." She glanced at herself in the mirror, hesitated, then got up and combed her hair and lipsticked her mouth. In the mirror she could see Gomez peering cautiously from the typewriter lid toward a spot over the window cooler. The shadowy coolness of the room lightened for a moment, and Gomez' eyes registered the change, but Maggie didn't mind. She was posing sultrily and liking the effect. Maggie had decided to cooperate for the time being and give the unseen watcher an eyeful.

Mind you, she was thinking furiously, if this is camouflage, it's out of my class . . . maybe out of this world. Then how am I to prove it? It might be easier just to go quietly nuts. . . . But I've got too much to do this week to go crazy. Next week, perhaps. What am I saying! Fie on this character, whoever it may be. With my tilted, eagle eye I will ferret him out!

Cheered, she began to do sitting-up exercises. Next, she stood on her head. Unfortunately she couldn't see anything, since her only garment fell down around her ears.

Mark opened her bedroom door and peered in.

"Good God, Maggie!" he said. "What's up?"

Maggie's head emerged from the folds of the slip, and she lay full length on the rug. "Just a game," she said. "Wanta play?"

"Please, Maggie," he said plaintively. "Not just now. I've got to go polish the car."

"Idiot," Maggie said. "I'm studying photography I think. Go away, you're apt to ruin the exposure."

"I am not," Mark said doggedly. "It's a lovely exposure, it's just that I have to—"

"—polish the car!" Maggie threatened him with a shoe. Mark sighed and withdrew, closing the door gently behind

him.

Maggie got up and dressed in shirt and shorts and tried the headstand again. Gomez watched her with wide-startled eyes. Next she bent down and peered back between her legs while turning slowly to survey all four sides of the room. Nothing. Wearily she sat a moment on the rug, rubbing her aching brow. Her eyes felt sandy, and she rubbed them, too. She glanced at Gomez and saw that he looked like two cats, one barely offsetting the other, like a color overlay on a magazine page that wasn't quite right. She rubbed her eyes harder to dispel the illusion, and just then she saw the watcher.

She and the watcher stared at each other across the intervening space and across the little black box the watcher held. Even now his image was not clear to Maggie. One moment he was there, the next he was a something-nothing, then he was gone.

Maggie rubbed furiously at her eyes again and brought him back to her vision. This time she was able to hold him there, though the image danced and swam and her eyes watered a little with the effort. It was just like any illusion, she thought; once you know the trick of looking at it, you feel stupid not to have seen it at once.

"Peek-a-boo," she said. "I see you. But stop wiggling."

The watcher's expression did not change. He continued to gaze at her raptly. But all the rest of him changed. He reminded Maggie of mirages she'd seen, linking and flattening mountain tops. Was he human? A moment ago, he might have been. But now he was a great whirl of gray petals with the black box and the staring eyes remaining still and cool in the center. The eyes were large, dark and unblinking. The gray petals now drooped like melted wax and flowed into stiffening horizontal lines like a stylized Christmas tree, and the liquid eyes became twin stars decorating its apex, with the black box dangling below like a gift tied to a branch. The tree dissolved and turned into a vase-shape, with delicate etchings of light on the gray that reminded Maggie of fine lace.

Maggie got up purposefully and walked toward the

fluidly shifting image. The watcher shrank into a small square shape that was like a window open onto cold, slanting lines of rain. Maggie reached out a hand and touched the solid plaster wall.

"Nuts," Maggie said. "I know you're there. Come out, come out, and we'll all take tea."

The watcher's gaze now turned toward her feet, and his form lengthened and narrowed so drastically that he reminded Maggie of nothing so much as a barber pole with gray and white stripes. The barber pole grew an appendage that pointed downward. It seemed to be pointing at Gomez, who had seated himself just where Maggie might most conveniently step on him, and was yawning as unconcerned as if the watcher did not exist, or as if he were quite used to him. The watcher grew another appendage, raised the black box, and just then a tiny shaft of light touched Gomez on the nose.

Maggie watched carefully, but Gomez did not seem to be hurt. He began to wash his face. "Is it a camera, then?" Maggie asked. No answer. She looked wildly around the room, grabbed up the framed photograph of her mother-in-law and showed it to the watcher. The staring eyes looked dubious. But by dint of using her eyebrows and all her facial muscles Maggie finally made her question clear to him. One appendage disappeared into the black box and drew out a tiny replica of Gomez yawning. It was a perfect little three-dimensional figurine, and Maggie coveted it with all her heart. She reached for it, but the wavering barber pole drew itself up stiffly, the eyes admired the figurine a few moments, glared haughtily at Maggie, and the figurine disappeared. Maggie's face expressed her disappointment.

"What about me?" Maggie pointed to herself, pantomimed the way he held the box, then touched her own nose lightly. The eyes at the top of the barber pole gazed at her blandly. The barber pole shuddered. Then the watcher pantomimed that Maggie should pick up Gomez and hold him. Maggie did, and again the little shaft of light hit Gomez on the nose.

"Hey!" Maggie said. "Did you get me, too? Let me see." No response from the watcher. "Oh well," Maggie said, maybe that one wasn't so good. How about this pose?" She smiled and pirouetted gracefully for the watcher, but the watcher only looked bored. There's nothing so disconcerting, Maggie thought, as a bored barber pole. She subsided into deep thought. Come to think of it, Gomez had been with her each time she'd sensed the presence of the thing.

"Blast and damn," she said. "I will not play a supporting role for any cat, even Gomez." She made fierce go-away motions to the image-maker. She shoved Gomez outside the bedroom. She created a host of nasty faces and tried them on for the watcher. She made shooing motions as if he were a chicken. Finally, in a burst of inspiration she printed the address of the Animal Shelter on a card and drew pictures of cats all around it. She held it up for the barber pole to read. The eyes looked puzzled, but willing. The little black box was being folded into itself until now it was no larger than an ice cube. The barber pole swelled into a caricature of a woman, a woman with enormous brandy-snifter-size breasts and huge flopping buttocks. The eyes were now set in a round, doughy, simpering face that somehow (horribly, incomprehensibly) reminded Maggie of her own. The watcher then, gazing straight at Maggie, mimicked all the nasty faces she'd made, stood on his (her?) head, peered between his legs, smiled and pirouetted, pretended to leer at himself in a mirror, and then, very deliberately, indicated with one spiraling finger atop his head that Maggie was nuts. He gave her one look of pure male amusement and disappeared.

"Come back and fight," Maggie said. "I dare you to say that again." She rubbed her eyes without much hope, and she was right. The watcher was gone.

Rather forlornly, Maggie took to her bed again. "It's the worst hangover I've ever had," Maggie moaned. "So maybe I wasn't looking my best, but it's a bitter blow . . ."

The worst of it was, she could never tell anybody, even Mark. What woman could ever admit she had less charm than a beat-up old tomcat? "But I've found out one thing."

Maggie thought. "I know now what dogs and cats stare at when people can't see anything there. . . ." But she almost wept when she remembered her old day-dream—of watchers lovingly studying and guiding mankind, or at least holding themselves ready to step in and help when the going got too rough. Suppose, though, the watchers considered mankind no more than servants to the other animals? Feeding and bathing them, providing warm houses and soft, safe beds. . . .

It was a sickening thought. Maggie harbored it for two minutes, and then resolutely dismissed it from mind.

"Fiddlesticks! He wasn't that stupid. In fact, he was a damn smart-aleck. So he liked Gomez. So what? Maybe he's a woman-hater."

She settled back against her pillow and opened the bird book:

Remember, birds can't count. When you build your blind, let two people enter it. Let one person go away, and the birds will return without fear, thinking they are safe. In this way, you will get good, natural pictures of our friends eating, fighting, and mating. . .

Mark opened the bedroom door and walked in. "Maggie?"

"Hmm?" Maggie went on reading.

"I couldn't polish the car. . . .", Mark grinned at her.

"Why not?" Maggie dropped the dull book with alacrity. She knew that grin.

"I kept thinking about that new game you were playing. . . Some type of photography, did you say? Then I know the perfect name for it."

"What?"

"It's called see-the-birdie, and it isn't a new game at all—it's just part of an old one."

Maggie stretched luxuriously and made an apparently irrelevant remark: "So long, hangover."

OF MISSING PERSONS

by
Jack Finney

Here, more than in any other story in this book (though "Bulkhead," and "Home There's No Returning" come close), is pure fable in the form of science-fantasy. And this time there is even a moral, clearly—if sadly—stated.

The conflict in this story is not, as in most of the others, generated by the prospect of problems we may have to face tomorrow or next year. It is the immediate and all-too-familiar problem of a normal, nice guy caught in the trap of steel and concrete, of wheels, fumes, and strangers that we call The City.

There were two other stories published this past year that handled the same theme, either of which might have been included here instead: Abernathy's "Single Combat," and "The Vanishing American," by Charles Beaumont. I chose the Finney, both for its compassionate treatment and for its evocative prose.

WALK IN as though it were an ordinary travel bureau, the stranger I'd met at a bar had told me. Ask a few ordinary questions—about a trip you're planning, a vacation, anything like that. Then hint about The Folder a little, but whatever you do, don't mention it directly; wait till he brings it up himself. And if he doesn't, you might as well forget it. If you can. Because you'll never see it; you're not the type, that's all. And if you ask about it, he'll just look at you as though he doesn't know what you're talking about.

I rehearsed it all in my mind, over and over, but what

seems possible at night over a beer isn't easy to believe on a raw, rainy day, and I felt like a fool, searching the store fronts for the street number I'd memorized. It was noon hour, West 42nd Street, New York, rainy and windy; and like half the men around me, I walked with a hand on my hatbrim, wearing an old trench coat, head bent into the slanting rain, and the world was real and drab, and this was hopeless.

Anyway, I couldn't help thinking, who am I to see The Folder, even if there is one? Name? I said to myself, as though I were already being asked. It's Charley Ewell, and I'm a young guy who works in a bank; a teller. I don't like the job; I don't make much money, and I never will. I've lived in New York for over three years and haven't many friends. What the heck, there's really nothing to say—I see more movies than I want to, read too many books, and I'm sick of meals alone in restaurants. I have ordinary abilities, looks, and thoughts. Does that suit you; do I qualify?

Now I spotted it, the address in the 200 block, an old, pseudo-modernized office building, tired, outdated, refusing to admit it but unable to hide it. New York is full of them, west of Fifth.

I pushed through the brass-framed glass doors into the tiny lobby, paved with freshly mopped, permanently dirty tile. The green-painted walls were lumpy from old plaster repairs; in a chrome frame hung a little wall directory—white-celluloid, easily changed letters on a black-felt background. There were some twenty-odd names, and I found "Acme Travel Bureau" second on the list, between "A-1 Mimeo" and "Ajax Magic Supplies." I pressed the bell beside the old-style, open-grille elevator door; it rang high up in the shaft. There was a long pause, then a thump, and the heavy chains began rattling slowly down toward me, and I almost turned and left—this was insane.

But upstairs the Acme office had divorced itself from the atmosphere of the building. I pushed open the pebble-glass door, walked in, and the big square room was bright and clean, fluorescent-lighted. Beside the wide double

windows, behind a counter, stood a tall gray-haired, grave-looking man, a telephone at his ear. He glanced up, nodded to beckon me in, and I felt my heart pumping—he fitted the description exactly. “Yes, United Air Lines,” he was saying into the phone. “Flight”—he glanced at a paper on the glass-topped counter—“seven-oh-three, and I suggest you check in forty minutes early.”

Standing before him now, I waited, leaning on the counter, glancing around; he was the man, all right, and yet this was just an ordinary travel agency: big bright posters on the walls, metal floor racks full of folders, printed schedules under the glass on the counter. This is just what it looks like and nothing else, I thought, and again I felt like a fool.

“Can I help you?” Behind the counter the tall gray-haired man was smiling at me, replacing the phone, and suddenly I was terribly nervous.

“Yes.” I stalled for time, unbuttoning my raincoat. Then I looked up at him again and said, “I’d like to—get away.” You fool, that’s too fast! I told myself. Don’t rush it! I watched in a kind of panic to see what effect my answer had had, but he didn’t flick an eyelash.

“Well, there are a lot of places to go,” he said politely. From under the counter he brought out a long, slim folder and laid it on the glass, turning it right side up for me. “Fly to Buenos Aires—Another World!” it said in a double row of pale-green letters across the top.

I looked at it long enough to be polite. It showed a big silvery plane banking over a harbor at night, a moon shining on the water, mountains in the background. Then I just shook my head; I was afraid to talk, afraid I’d say the wrong thing.

“Something quieter, maybe?” He brought out another folder: thick old tree trunks, rising way up out of sight; sunbeams slanting down through them—“The Virgin Forests of Maine, via Boston and Maine Railroad.” “Or”—he laid a third folder on the glass—“Bermuda is nice just now.” This one said, “Bermuda, Old World in the New.”

I decided to risk it. “No,” I said, and shook my head.

"What I'm really looking for is a permanent place. A new place to live and settle down in." I stared directly into his eyes. "For the rest of my life." Then my nerve failed me, and I tried to think of a way to backtrack.

But he only smiled pleasantly and said, "I don't know why we can't advise you on that." He leaned forward on the counter, resting on his forearms, hands clasped; he had all the time in the world for me, his posture conveyed. "What are you looking for; what do you want?"

I held my breath, then said it. "Escape."

"From what?"

"Well—" Now I hesitated; I'd never put it into words before. "From New York, I'd say. And cities in general. From worry. And fear. And the things I read in my newspapers. From loneliness." And then I couldn't stop, though I knew I was talking too much, the words spilling out. "From never doing what I really want to do or having much fun. From selling my days just to stay alive. From life itself—the way it is today, at least." I looked straight at him and said softly, "From the world."

Now he was frankly staring, his eyes studying my face intently with no pretense of doing anything else, and I knew that in a moment he'd shake his head and say, "Mister, you better get to a doctor." But he didn't. He continued to stare, his eyes examining my forehead now. He was a big man, his gray hair crisp and curling, his lined face very intelligent, very kind; he looked the way ministers should look; he looked the way all fathers should look.

He lowered his gaze to look into my eyes and beyond them; he studied my mouth, my chin, the line of my jaw, and I had the sudden conviction that without any difficulty he was learning a great deal about me, more than I knew myself. Suddenly he smiled and placed both elbows on the counter, one hand grasping the other fist and gently massaging it. "Do you like people? Tell the truth, because I'll know if you aren't."

"Yes. It isn't easy for me to relax though, and be myself, and make friends."

He nodded gravely, accepting that. "Would you say you're a reasonably decent kind of man?"

"I guess so; I think so." I shrugged.

"Why?"

I smiled wryly; this was hard to answer. "Well—at least when I'm not, I'm usually sorry about it."

He grinned at that, and considered it for a moment or so. Then he smiled—deprecatingly, as though he were about to tell a little joke that wasn't too good. "You know," he said casually, "we occasionally get people in here who seem to be looking for pretty much what you are. So just as a sort of little joke—"

I couldn't breathe. This was what I'd been told he would say if he thought I might do.

"—we've worked up a little folder. We've even had it printed. Simply for our own amusement, you understand. And for occasional clients like you. So I'll have to ask you to look at it here if you're interested. It's not the sort of thing we'd care to have generally known."

I could barely whisper, "I'm interested."

He fumbled under the counter, then brought out a long thin folder, the same size and shape as the others, and slid it over the glass toward me.

I looked at it, pulling it closer with a finger tip, almost afraid to touch it. The cover was dark blue, the shade of a night sky, and across the top in white letters it said, "Visit Enchanting Verna!" The blue cover was sprinkled with white dots—stars—and in the lower left corner was a globe, the world, half surrounded by clouds. At the upper right, just under the word "Verna," was a star larger and brighter than the others; rays shot out from it, like from a star on a Christmas card. Across the bottom of the cover it said, "Romantic Verna, where life is the way it *should* be." There was a little arrow beside the legend, meaning Turn the page.

I turned, and the folder was like most travel folders inside—there were pictures and text, only these were about "Verna" instead of Paris, or Rome, or the Bahamas. And it was beautifully printed; the pictures looked real. What

I mean is, you've seen color stereopticon pictures? Well, that's what these were like, only better, far better. In one picture you could see dew glistening on grass, and it looked wet. In another, a tree trunk seemed to curve out of the page, in perfect detail, and it was a shock to touch it and feel smooth paper instead of the rough actuality of bark. Miniature human faces, in a third picture, seemed about to speak, the lips moist and alive, the eyeballs shining, the actual texture of skin right there on paper; and it seemed impossible, as you stared, that the people wouldn't move and speak.

I studied a large picture spreading across the tops of two open pages. It seemed to have been taken from the top of a hill; you saw the land dropping away at your feet far down into a valley, then rising up again, way over on the other side. The slopes of both hills were covered with forest, and the color was beautiful, perfect; there were miles of green, majestic trees, and you knew as you looked that this forest was virgin, almost untouched. Curving through the floor of the valley, far below, ran a stream, blue from the sky in most places; here and there, where the current broke around massive boulders, the water was foaming white; and again it seemed that if you'd only look closely enough you'd be certain to see that stream move and shine in the sun. In clearings beside the stream there were shake-roofed cabins, some of logs, some of brick or adobe. The caption under the picture simply said, "The Colony."

"Fun fooling around with a thing like that," the man behind the counter murmured, nodding at the folder in my hands. "Relieves the monotony. Attractive-looking place, isn't it?"

I could only nod dumbly, lowering my eyes to the picture again because that picture told you even more than just what you saw. I don't know how you knew this, but you realized, staring at that forest-covered valley, that this was very much the way America once looked when it was new. And you knew this was only a part of a whole land

of unspoiled, unharmed forests, where every stream ran pure; you were seeing what people, the last of them dead over a century ago, had once looked at in Kentucky and Wisconsin and the old Northwest. And you knew that if you could breathe in that air you'd feel it flow into your lungs sweeter than it's been anywhere on earth for a hundred and fifty years.

Under that picture was another, of six or eight people on a beach—the shore of a lake, maybe, or the river in the picture above. Two children were squatting on their haunches, dabbling in the water's edge, and in the foreground a half circle of adults were sitting, kneeling, or squatting in comfortable balance on the yellow sand. They were talking, several were smoking, and most of them held half-filled coffee cups; the sun was bright, you knew the air was balmy and that it was morning, just after breakfast. They were smiling, one woman talking, the others listening. One man had half risen from his squatting position to skip a stone out onto the surface of the water.

You knew this: that they were spending twenty minutes or so down on that beach after breakfast before going to work, and you knew they were friends and that they did this every day. You knew—I tell you, you *knew*—that they liked their work, all of them, whatever it was; that there was no forced hurry or pressure about it. And that—well, that's all, I guess; you just knew that every day after breakfast these families spent a leisurely half hour sitting and talking, there in the morning sun, down on that wonderful beach.

I'd never seen anything like their faces before. They were ordinary enough in looks, the people in that picture—pleasant, more or less familiar types. Some were young, in their twenties; others were in their thirties; one man and woman seemed around fifty. But the faces of the youngest couple were completely unlined, and it occurred to me then that they had been born there, and that it was a place where no one worried or was ever afraid. The others, the older ones, there were lines in their foreheads, grooves around their mouths, but you felt that the lines

were no longer deepening, that they were healed and untroubled scars. And in the faces of the oldest couple was a look of—I'd say it was a look of permanent *relief*. Not one of those faces bore a trace of malice; these people were *happy*. But even more than that, you knew they'd *been* happy, day after day after day for a long, long time, and that they always would be, and they knew it.

I wanted to join them. The most desperate longing roared up in me from the bottom of my soul to *be* there—on that beach, after breakfast, with those people in the sunny morning—and I could hardly stand it. I looked up at the man behind the counter and managed to smile. "This is—very interesting."

"Yes." He smiled back, then shook his head in amusement. "We've had customers so interested, so carried away, that they didn't want to talk about anything else." He laughed. "They actually wanted to know rates, details, everything."

I nodded to show I understood and agreed with them. "And I suppose you've worked out a whole story to go with this?" I glanced at the folder in my hands.

"Oh, yes. What would you like to know?"

"These people," I said softly, and touched the picture of the group on the beach. "What do they do?"

"They work; everyone does." He took a pipe from his pocket. "They simply live their lives doing what they like. Some study. We have, according to our little story," he added, and smiled, "a very fine library. Some of our people farm, some write, some make things with their hands. Most of them raise children, and—well, they work at whatever it is they really want to do."

"And if there isn't anything they really want to do?"

He shook his head. "There is always something, for everyone, that he really wants to do. It's just that here there is so rarely time to find out what it is." He brought out a tobacco pouch and, leaning on the counter, began filling his pipe, his eyes level with mine, looking at me gravely. "Life is simple there, and it's serene. In some ways,

the good ways, it's like the early pioneering communities here in your country, but without the drudgery that killed people young. There is electricity. There are washing machines, vacuum cleaners, plumbing, modern bathrooms, and modern medicine, very modern. But there are no radios, television, telephones, or automobiles. Distances are small, and people live and work in small communities. They raise or make most of the things they use. Every man builds his own house, with all the help he needs from his neighbors. Their recreation is their own, and there is a great deal of it, but there is no recreation for sale, nothing you buy a ticket to. They have dances, card parties, weddings, christenings, birthday celebrations, harvest parties. There are swimming and sports of all kinds. There is conversation, a lot of it, plenty of joking and laughter. There is a great deal of visiting and sharing of meals, and each day is well filled and well spent. There are no pressures, economic or social, and life holds few threats. Every man, woman, and child is a happy person." After a moment he smiled. "I'm repeating the text, of course, in our little joke"—he nodded at the folder.

"Of course," I murmured, and looked down at the folder again, turning a page. "Homes in The Colony," said a caption, and there, true and real, were a dozen or so pictures of the interiors of what must have been the cabins I'd seen in the first photograph, or others like them. There were living rooms, kitchens, dens, patios. Many of the homes seemed to be furnished in a kind of Early American style, except that it looked—authentic, as though those rocking chairs, cupboards, tables, and hooked rugs had been made by the people themselves, taking their time and making them well and beautifully. Others of the interiors seemed modern in style; one showed a definite Oriental influence.

All of them had, plainly and unmistakably, one quality in common: You knew as you looked at them that these rooms were *home*, really home, to the people who lived in them. On the wall of one living room, over the stone fire-

place, hung a hand-stitched motto; it said, "There Is No Place Like Home," but the words didn't seem quaint or amusing, they didn't seem old-fashioned, resurrected or copied from a past that was gone. They seemed real; they belonged; those words were nothing more or less than a simple expression of true feeling and fact.

"Who are you?" I lifted my head from the folder to stare into the man's eyes.

He lighted his pipe, taking his time, sucking the match flame down into the bowl; eyes glancing up at me. "It's in the text," he said then, "on the back page. We—that is to say, the people of Verna, the original inhabitants—are people like yourself. Verna is a planet of air, sun, land, and sea, like this one. And of the same approximate temperature. So life evolved there, of course, just about as it has here, though rather earlier; and we are people like you. There are trivial anatomical differences, but nothing important. We read and enjoy your James Thurber, John Clayton, Rabelais, Allen Marple, Hemingway, Grimm, Mark Twain, Alan Nelson. We like your chocolate, which we didn't have, and a great deal of your music. And you'd like many of the things we have. Our thoughts, though, and the great aims and directions of our history and development have been—drastically different from yours." He smiled and blew out a puff of smoke. "Amusing fantasy, isn't it?"

"Yes." I knew I sounded abrupt, and I hadn't stopped to smile; the words were spilling out. "And where is Verna?"

"Light years away, by your measurements."

I was suddenly irritated, I didn't know why. "A little hard to get to, then, wouldn't it be?"

For a moment he looked at me; then he turned to the window beside him. "Come here," he said, and I walked around the counter to stand beside him. "There, off to the left"—he put a hand on my shoulder and pointed with his pipe stem—"are two apartment buildings, built back to back. The entrance to one is on Fifth Avenue, the entrance to the other on Sixth. See them? In the middle of the block;

you can just see their roofs."

I nodded, and he said, "A man and his wife live on the fourteenth floor of one of those buildings. A wall of their living room is the back wall of the building. They have friends on the fourteenth floor of the other building, and a wall of *their* living room is the back wall of *their* building. These two couples live, in other words, within two feet of one another, since the back building walls actually touch."

The big man smiled. "But when the Robinsons want to visit the Bradens, they walk from their living room to the front door. Then they walk down a long hall to the elevators. They ride fourteen floors down; then, in the street, they must walk around to the next block. And the city blocks there are long; in bad weather they have sometimes actually taken a cab. They walk into the other building, then go on through the lobby, ride up fourteen floors, walk down a hall, ring a bell, and are finally admitted into their friends' living room—only two feet from their own."

The big man turned back to the counter, and I walked around it to the other side again. "All I can tell you," he said then, "is that the way the Robinsons travel is like space travel, the actual physical crossing of those enormous distances." He shrugged. "But if they could only step through those two feet of wall without harming themselves or the wall—well, that is how we 'travel.' We don't cross space, we avoid it." He smiled. "Draw a breath here—and exhale it on Verna."

I said softly, "And that's how they arrived, isn't it? The people in the picture. You took them there." He nodded, and I said, "Why?"

He shrugged. "If you saw a neighbor's house on fire, would you rescue his family if you could? As many as you could, at least?"

"Yes."

"Well—so would we."

"You think it's that bad, then? With us?"

"How does it look to you?"

I thought about the headlines in my morning paper, that

morning and every morning. "Not so good."

He just nodded and said, "We can't take you all, can't even take very many. So we've been selecting a few."

"For how long?"

"A long time." He smiled. "One of us was a member of Lincoln's cabinet. But it was not until just before your First World War that we felt we could see what was coming; until then we'd been merely observers. We opened our first agency in Mexico City in nineteen thirteen. Now we have branches in every major city."

"Nineteen thirteen," I murmured, as something caught at my memory. "Mexico. Listen! Did—"

"Yes." He smiled, anticipating my question. "Ambrose Bierce joined us that year, or the next. He lived until nineteen thirty-one, a very old man, and wrote four more books, which we have." He turned back a page in the folder and pointed to a cabin in the first large photograph. "That was his home."

"And what about Judge Crater?"

"Crater?"

"Another famous disappearance; he was a New York judge who simply disappeared some years ago."

"I don't know. We had a judge, I remember, from New York City, some twenty-odd years ago, but I can't recall his name."

I leaned across the counter toward him, my face very close to his, and I nodded. "I like your little joke," I said. "I like it very much, more than I can possibly tell you." Very softly I added, "When does it stop being a joke?"

For a moment he studied me; then he spoke. "Now. If you want it to."

You've got to decide on the spot, the middle-aged man at the Lexington Avenue bar had told me, because you'll never get another chance. I know; I've tried. Now I stood there thinking; there were people I'd hate never to see again, and a girl I was just getting to know, and this was the world I'd been born in. Then I thought about leaving that room, going back to my job, then back to my room

at night. And finally I thought of the deep-green valley in the picture and the little yellow beach in the morning sun. "I'll go," I whispered. "If you'll have me."

He studied my face. "Be sure," he said sharply. "Be certain. We want no one there who won't be happy, and if you have any least doubt, we'd prefer that—"

"I'm sure," I said.

After a moment the gray-haired man slid open a drawer under the counter and brought out a little rectangle of yellow cardboard. One side was printed, and through the printing ran a band of light green; it looked like a railroad ticket to White Plains or somewhere. The printing said, "Good, when validated, for ONE TRIP TO VERNA, Non-transferable. One-way only."

"Ah—how much?" I said, reaching for my wallet, wondering if he wanted me to pay.

He glanced at my hand on my hip pocket. "All you've got. Including your small change." He smiled. "You won't need it any more, and we can use your currency for operating expense. Light bills, rent, and so on."

"I don't have much."

"That doesn't matter." From under the counter he brought out a heavy stamping machine, the kind you see in railroad ticket offices. "We once sold a ticket for thirty-seven hundred dollars. And we sold another just like it for six cents." He slid the ticket into the machine, struck the lever with his fist, then handed the ticket to me. On the back, now was a freshly printed rectangle of purple ink, and within it the words, "Good this day only," followed by the date. I put two five-dollar bills, a one, and seventeen cents in change on the counter. "Take the ticket to the Acme Depot," the gray-haired man said, and, leaning across the counter, began giving me directions for getting there.

It's a tiny hole-in-the-wall, the Acme Depot; you may have seen it—just a little store front on one of the narrow streets west of Broadway. On the window is painted, not very well, "Acme." Inside, the walls and ceiling, under

layers of old paint, are covered with the kind of stamped tin you see in old buildings. There's a worn wooden counter and a few battered chrome-and-imitation-red-leather chairs. There are scores of places like the Acme Depot in that area—little theatre-ticket agencies, obscure bus-line offices, employment agencies. You could pass this one a thousand times and never really see it; and if you live in New York, you probably have.

Behind the counter, when I arrived, a shirt-sleeved man smoking a cigar stump stood working on some papers; four or five people silently waited in the chairs. The man at the counter glanced up as I stepped in, looked down at my hand for my ticket, and when I showed it, nodded at the last vacant chair, and I sat down.

There was a girl beside me, hands folded on her purse. She was pleasant-looking, rather pretty; I thought she might have been a stenographer. Across the narrow little office sat a young Negro in work clothes, his wife beside him holding their little girl in her lap. And there was a man of around fifty, his face averted from the rest of us, staring out into the rain at passing pedestrians. He was expensively dressed and wore a gray Homburg hat; he could have been the vice-president of a large bank, I thought, and I wondered what his ticket had cost.

Maybe twenty minutes passed, the man behind the counter working on some papers; then a small, battered old bus pulled up at the curb outside, and I heard the hand brake set. The bus was a shabby thing, bought third- or fourth-hand and painted red and white over the old paint, the fenders lumpy from countless pounded-out dents, the tire treads worn almost smooth. On the side, in red letters, it said "Acme," and the driver wore a leather jacket and the kind of worn cloth cap that cab drivers wear. It was precisely the sort of obscure little bus you see around there, ridden always by shabby, tired, silent people, going no one knows where.

It took nearly two hours for the little bus to work south through the traffic, toward the tip of Manhattan, and we all sat, each wrapped in his own silence and thoughts, star-

ing out the rain-spattered windows; the little girl was asleep. Through the streaking glass beside me I watched drenched people huddled at city bus stops, and saw them rap angrily on the closed doors of buses jammed to capacity, and saw the strained, harassed faces of the drivers. At 14th Street I saw a speeding cab splash a sheet of street-dirty water on a man at the curb, and saw the man's mouth writhe as he cursed. Often our bus stood motionless, the traffic light red, as throngs flowed out into the street from the curb, threading their way around us and the other waiting cars. I saw hundreds of faces, and not once did I see anyone smile.

I dozed; then we were on a glistening black highway somewhere on Long Island. I slept again, and awakened in darkness as we jolted off the highway onto a muddy double-rut road, and I caught a glimpse of a farmhouse, the windows dark. Then the bus slowed, lurched once, and stopped. The hand brake set, the motor died, and we were parked beside what looked like a barn.

It *was* a barn—the driver walked up to it, pulled the big sliding wood door open, its wheels creaking on the rusted old trolley overhead, and stood holding it open as we filed in. Then he released it, stepping inside with us, and the big door slid closed of its own weight. The barn was damp, old, the walls no longer plumb, and it smelled of cattle; there was nothing inside on the packed-dirt floor but a bench of unpainted pine, and the driver indicated it with the beam of a flashlight. "Sit here, please," he said quietly. "Get your tickets ready." Then he moved down the line, punching each of our tickets, and on the floor I caught a momentary glimpse, in the shifting beam of his light, of tiny mounds of countless more round bits of cardboard, like little drifts of yellow confetti. Then he was at the door again, sliding it open just enough to pass through, and for a moment we saw him silhouetted against the night sky. "Good luck," he said. "Just wait where you are." He released the door; it slid closed, snipping off the wavering beam of his flashlight; and a moment later we heard the motor start and the bus lumber away in low gear.

The dark barn was silent now, except for our breathing. Time ticked away, and I felt an urge, presently, to speak to whoever was next to me. But I didn't quite know what to say, and I began to feel embarrassed, a little foolish, and very aware that I was simply sitting in an old and deserted barn. The seconds passed, and I moved my feet restlessly; presently I realized that I was getting cold and chilled. Then suddenly I knew—and my face flushed in violent anger and a terrible shame. We'd been tricked! bilked out of our money by our pathetic will to believe an absurd and fantastic fable and left, now, to sit there as long as we pleased, until we came to our senses finally, like countless others before us, and made our way home as best we could. It was suddenly impossible to understand or even remember how I could have been so gullible, and I was on my feet, stumbling through the dark across the uneven floor, with some notion of getting to a phone and the police. The big barn door was heavier than I'd thought, but I slid it back, took a running step through it, then turned to shout back to the others to come along.

You perhaps have seen how very much you can observe in the fractional instant of a lightning flash—an entire landscape sometimes, every detail etched on your memory, to be seen and studied in your mind for long moments afterward. As I turned back toward the opened door the inside of that barn came alight. Through every wide crack of its walls and ceiling and through the big dust-coated windows in its side streamed the light of an intensely brilliant blue and sunny sky, and the air pulling into my lungs as I opened my mouth to shout was sweeter than any I had ever tasted in my life. Dimly, through a wide, dust-smeared window of that barn, I looked—for less than the blink of an eye—down into a deep majestic V of forest-covered slope, and I saw, tumbling through it, far below, a tiny stream, blue from the sky, and at that stream's edge between two low roofs a yellow patch of sun-drenched beach. And then, that picture engraved on my mind forever, the heavy door slid shut, my fingernails rasping along the splintery wood in a desperate effort to stop it—and I

was standing alone in a cold and rain-swept night.

It took four or five seconds, no longer, fumbling at that door, to heave it open again. But it was four or five seconds too long. The barn was empty, dark. There was nothing inside but a worn pine bench—and, in the flicker of the lighted match in my hand, tiny drifts of what looked like damp confetti on the floor. As my mind had known even as my hands scratched at the outside of that door, there was no one inside now; and I knew where they were—knew they were walking, laughing aloud in a sudden wonderful and eager ecstasy, down into that forest-green valley, toward home.

I work in a bank, in a job I don't like; and I ride to and from it in the subway, reading the daily papers, the news they contain. I live in a rented room, and in the battered dresser under a pile of my folded handkerchiefs is a little rectangle of yellow cardboard. Printed on its face are the words, "Good when validated, for one trip to Verna," and stamped on the back is a date. But the date is gone, long since, the ticket void, punched in a pattern of tiny holes.

I've been back to the Acme Travel Bureau. The first time the tall gray-haired man walked up to me and laid two five-dollar bills, a one, and seventeen cents in change before me. "You left this on the counter last time you were here," he said gravely. Looking me squarely in the eyes, he added bleakly. "I don't know why." Then some customers came in, he turned to greet them, and there was nothing for me to do but leave.

Walk in as though it were the ordinary agency it seems—you can find it, somewhere, in any city you try! Ask a few ordinary questions—about a trip you're planning, a vacation, anything you like. Then hint about The Folder a little, but don't mention it directly. Give him time to size you up and offer it himself. And if he does, if you're the type, if you can believe—then make up your mind and stick to it! Because you won't ever get a second chance. I know, because I've tried. And tried. And tried.

DREAMING IS A PRIVATE THING

by
Isaac Asimov

The more that we—as a civilization—surround ourselves with bulwarks against the harshness or discomfort of the natural world, the more we seem to crave the “canned” excitements of art and entertainment. With real physical dangers too few and far between to keep our glands stimulated, and real physical hungers too often satisfied too easily, we keep contriving more and surer ways to give ourselves the jolt in the arm that we must have, to stay aware of being alive.

Isaac Asimov, who has been writing science-fiction long enough to know whereof he speaks, here tells a story of the men who make the dreams . . .

*“I wonder often what the vintners buy,
One half so precious as the stuff they sell . . .”*

JESSE WEILL looked up from his desk. His old spare body, his sharp high-bridge nose, deep-set shadowy eyes and amazing shock of white hair had trademarked his appearance during the years that Dreams, Inc. had become world-famous.

He said, “Is the boy here already, Joe?”

Joe Dooley was short and heavyset. A cigar caressed his moist lower lip. He took it away for a moment and nodded. “His folks are with him. They’re all scared.”

“You’re sure this is not a false alarm, Joe? I haven’t got much time.” He looked at his watch. “Government business at two.”

“This is a sure thing, Mr. Weill.” Dooley’s face was a

study in earnestness. His jowls quivered with persuasive intensity. "Like I told you, I picked him up playing some kind of basketball game in the schoolyard. You should've seen the kid. He stunk. When he had his hands on the ball, his own team had to take it away, and fast, but just the same he had all the stance of a star player. Know what I mean? To me it was a giveaway."

"Did you talk to him?"

"Well, sure. I stopped him at lunch. You know me." Dooley gestured expansively with his cigar and caught the severed ash with his other hand. "'Kid,' I said—"

"And he's dream material?"

"I said, 'Kid, I just came from Africa and—' "

"All right." Weill held up the palm of his hand. "Your word I'll always take. How you do it I don't know, but when you say a boy is a potential dreamer, I'll gamble. Bring him in."

The youngster came in between his parents. Dooley pushed chairs forward and Weill rose to shake hands. He smiled at the youngster in a way that turned the wrinkles of his face into benevolent creases.

"You're Tommy Slutsky?"

Tommy nodded wordlessly. He was about ten and a little small for that. His dark hair was plastered down unconvincingly and his face was unrealistically clean.

Weill said, "You're a good boy?"

The boy's mother smiled at once and patted Tommy's head maternally (a gesture which did not soften the anxious expression on the youngster's face). She said, "He's always a very good boy."

Weill let this dubious statement pass. "Tell me, Tommy," he said, and held out a lollipop which was first hesitantly considered, then accepted. "Do you ever listen to dreamies?"

"Sometimes," said Tommy, in an uncertain treble.

Mr. Slutsky cleared his throat. He was broad-shouldered and thick-fingered, the type of laboring man who, every once in a while, to the confusion of eugenics, sired a dreamer. "We rented one or two for the boy. Real old

ones."

Weill nodded. He said, "Did you like them, Tommy?"

"They were sort of silly."

"You think up better ones for yourself, do you?"

The grin that spread over the ten-year-old features had the effect of taking away some of the unreality of the slicked hair and washed face.

Weill went on, gently, "Would you like to make up a dream for me?"

Tommy was instantly embarrassed. "I guess not."

"It won't be hard. It's very easy. — Joe."

Dooley moved a screen out of the way and rolled forward a dream-recorder.

The youngster looked owlshly at it.

Weill lifted the helmet and brought it close to the boy.

"Do you know what this is?"

Tommy shrank away. "No."

"It's a thinker. That's what we call it because people think into it. You put it on your head and think anything you want."

"Then what happens?"

"Nothing at all. It feels nice."

"No," said Tommy, "I guess I'd rather not."

His mother bent hurriedly toward him. "It won't hurt, Tommy. You do what the man says." There was an unmistakable edge to her voice.

Tommy stiffened and looked as though he might cry, but he didn't. Weill put the thinker on him.

He did it gently and slowly and let it remain there for some 30 seconds before speaking again, to let the boy assure himself it would do no harm, to let him get used to the insinuating touch of the fibrils against the sutures of his skull (penetrating the skin so finely as to be almost insensible), and finally to let him get used to the faint hum of the alternating field vortices.

Then he said, "Now would you think for us?"

"About what?" Only the boy's nose and mouth showed.

"About anything you want. What's the best thing you would like to do when school is out?"

The boy thought a moment and said, with rising inflection, "Go on a stratojet?"

"Why not? Sure thing. You go on a jet. It's taking off right now." He gestured lightly to Dooley, who threw the freezer into circuit.

Weill kept the boy only five minutes and then let him and his mother be escorted from the office by Dooley. Tommy looked bewildered but undamaged by the ordeal.

Weill said to the father, "Now, Mr. Slutsky, if your boy does well on this test, we'll be glad to pay you five hundred dollars each year until he finishes high school. In that time, all we'll ask is that he spend an hour a week some afternoon at our special school."

"Do I have to sign a paper?" Slutsky's voice was a bit hoarse.

"Certainly. This is business, Mr. Slutsky."

"Well, I don't know. Dreamers are hard to come by, I hear."

"They are. They are. But your son, Mr. Slutsky, is not a dreamer yet. He might never be. Five hundred dollars a year is a gamble for us. It's not a gamble for you. When he's finished high school, it may turn out he's not a dreamer, yet you've lost nothing. You've gained maybe four thousand dollars altogether. If he is a dreamer, he'll make a nice living and you certainly haven't lost then."

"He'll need special training, won't he?"

"Oh, yes, most intensive. But we don't have to worry about that till after he's finished high school. Then, after two years with us, he'll be developed. Rely on me, Mr. Slutsky."

"Will you guarantee that special training?"

Weill, who had been shoving a paper across the desk at Slutsky, and punching a pen wrong-side-to at him, put the pen down and chuckled, "Guarantee? No. How can we when we don't know for sure yet if he's a real talent? Still, the five hundred a year will stay yours."

Slutsky pondered and shook his head. "I tell you straight out, Mr. Weill— After your man arranged to have us come here, I called Luster-Think. They said they'll guarantee

training."

Weill sighed. "Mr. Slutsky, I don't like to talk against a competitor. If they say they'll guarantee training, they'll do as they say, but they can't make a boy a dreamer if he hasn't got it in him, training or not. If they take a plain boy without the proper talent and put him through a development course, they'll ruin him. A dreamer he won't be, that I guarantee you. And a normal human being he won't be, either. Don't take the chance of doing it to your son.

"Now Dreams, Inc. will be perfectly honest with you. If he can be a dreamer, we'll make him one. If not, we'll give him back to you without having tampered with him and say, 'Let him learn a trade.' He'll be better and healthier that way. I tell you, Mr. Slutsky—I have sons and daughters and grandchildren so I know what I say—I would not allow a child of mine to be pushed into dreaming if he's not ready for it. Not for a million dollars."

Slutsky wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and reached for the pen. "What does this say?"

"This is just an option. We pay you a hundred dollars in cash right now. No strings attached. We'll study the boy's reverie. If we feel it's worth following up, we'll call you in again and make the five-hundred-dollar-a-year deal. Leave yourself in my hands, Mr. Slutsky, and don't worry. You won't be sorry."

Slutsky signed.

Weill passed the document through the file slot and handed an envelope to Slutsky.

Five minutes later, alone in the office, he placed the unfreezer over his own head and absorbed the boy's reverie intently. It was a typically childish daydream. First Person was at the controls of the plane, which looked like a compound of illustrations out of the filmed thrillers that still circulated among those who lacked the time, desire or money for dream-cylinders.

When he removed the unfreezer, he found Dooley looking at him.

"Well, Mr. Weill, what do you think?" said Dooley, with

an eager and proprietary air.

"Could be, Joe. Could be. He has the overtones and for a ten-year-old boy without a scrap of training it's hopeful. When the plane went through a cloud, there was a distinct sensation of pillows. Also the smell of clean sheets, which was an amusing touch. We can go with him a ways, Joe."

"Good." Joe beamed happily at Weill's approval.

"But I tell you, Joe, what we really need is to catch them still sooner. And why not? Some day, Joe, every child will be tested at birth. A difference in the brain there positively must be and it should be found. Then we could separate the dreamers at the very beginning."

"Hell, Mr. Weill," said Dooley, looking hurt. "What would happen to my job then?"

Weill laughed. "No cause to worry yet, Joe. It won't happen in our lifetimes. In mine, certainly not. We'll be depending on good talent scouts like you for many years. You just watch the playgrounds and the streets"—Weill's gnarled hand dropped to Dooley's shoulder with a gentle, approving pressure—"and find us a few more Hillarys and Janows and Luster-Think won't ever catch us.—Now get out. I want lunch and then I'll be ready for my 2 o'clock appointment. The government, Joe, the government. And he winked portentously.

Jesse Weill's 2 o'clock appointment was with a young man, apple-cheeked, spectacled, sandy-haired and glowing with the intensity of a man with a mission. He presented his credentials across Weill's desk and revealed himself to be John J. Byrne, an agent of the Department of Arts and Sciences.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Byrne," said Weill. "In what way can I be of service?"

"Are we private here?" asked the agent. He had an unexpected baritone.

"Quite private."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to absorb this." Byrne produced a small and battered cylinder and held it out between thumb and forefinger.

Weill took it, hefted it, turned it this way and that and said with a denture-revealing smile, "Not the product of Dreams, Inc., Mr. Byrne."

"I didn't think it was," said the agent. "I'd still like you to absorb it. I'd set the automatic cutoff for about a minute, though."

"That's all that can be endured?" Weill pulled the receiver to his desk and placed the cylinder in the unfreeze compartment. He removed it, polished either end of the cylinder with his handkerchief and tried again. "It doesn't make good contact," he said. "An amateurish job."

He placed the cushioned unfreeze helmet over his skull and adjusted the temple contacts, then set the automatic cutoff. He leaned back and clasped his hands over his chest and began absorbing.

His fingers grew rigid and clutched at his jacket. After the cutoff had brought absorption to an end, he removed the unfreezer and looked faintly angry. "A raw piece," he said. "It's lucky I'm an old man so that such things no longer bother me."

Byrne said stiffly, "It's not the worst we've found. And the fad is increasing."

Weill shrugged. "Pornographic dreamies. It's a logical development, I suppose."

The government man said, "Logical or not, it represents a deadly danger for the moral fiber of the nation."

"The moral fiber," said Weill, "can take a lot of beating. Erotica of one form or another has been circulated all through history."

"Not like this, sir. A direct mind-to-mind stimulation is much more effective than smoking-room stories or filthy pictures. Those must be filtered through the senses and lose some of their effect in that way."

Weill could scarcely argue that point. He said, "What would you have me do?"

"Can you suggest a possible source for this cylinder?"

"Mr. Byrne, I'm not a policeman."

"No, no, I'm not asking you to do our work for us. The Department is quite capable of conducting its own investi-

gations. Can you help us, I mean, from your own specialized knowledge? You say your company did not put out that filth. Who did?"

"No reputable dream-distributor. I'm sure of that. It's too cheaply made."

"That could have been done on purpose."

"And no professional dreamer originated it."

"Are you sure, Mr. Weill? Couldn't dreamers do this sort of thing for some small illegitimate concern for money—or for fun?"

"They could, but not this particular one. No overtones. It's two-dimensional. Of course, a thing like this doesn't need overtones."

"What do you mean, overtones?"

Weill laughed gently, "You are not a dreamie fan?"

Byrne tried not to look virtuous and did not entirely succeed. "I prefer music."

"Well, that's all right, too," said Weill, tolerantly, "but it makes it a little harder to explain overtones. Even people who absorb dreamies might not be able to explain if you asked them. Still they'd know a dreamie was no good if the overtones were missing, even if they couldn't tell you why. Look, when an experienced dreamer goes into reverie, he doesn't think a story like in the old-fashioned television or book-films. It's a series of little visions. Each one has several meanings. If you studied them carefully, you'd find maybe five or six. While absorbing them in the ordinary way, you would never notice, but careful study shows it. Believe me, my psychological staff puts in long hours on just that point. All the overtones, the different meanings, blend together into a mass of guided emotion. Without them, everything would be flat, tasteless."

"Now this morning, I tested a young boy. A ten-year-old with possibilities. A cloud to him isn't just a cloud, it's a pillow too. Having the sensations of both, it was more than either. Of course, the boy's very primitive. But when he's through with his schooling, he'll be trained and disciplined. He'll be subjected to all sorts of sensations. He'll store up experience. He'll study and analyze classic dream-

ies of the past. He'll learn how to control and direct his thoughts, though, mind you, I have always said that when a good dreamer improvises—"

Weill halted abruptly, then proceeded in less impassioned tones, "I shouldn't get excited. All I'm trying to bring out now is that every professional dreamer has his own type of overtones which he can't mask. To an expert it's like signing his name on the dreamie. And I, Mr. Byrne, know all the signatures. Now that piece of dirt you brought me has no overtones at all. It was done by an ordinary person. A little talent, maybe, but like you and me, he can't think."

Byrne reddened a trifle. "Not everyone can't think, Mr. Weill, even if they don't make dreamies."

"Oh, tush," and Weill wagged his hand in the air. "Don't be angry with what an old man says. I don't mean *think* as in *reason*. I mean *think* as in *dream*. We all can dream after a fashion, just like we all can run. But can you and I run a mile in under four minutes? You and I can talk but are we Daniel Websters? Now when I think of a steak, I think of the word. Maybe I have a quick picture of a brown steak on a platter. Maybe you have a better pictorialization of it and you can see the crisp fat and the onions and the baked potato. I don't know. But a *dreamer* . . . He sees it and smells it and tastes it and everything about it, with the charcoal and the satisfied feeling in the stomach and the way the knife cuts through it and a hundred other things all at once. Very sensual. Very sensual. You and I can't do it."

"Weill then," said Byrne, "no professional dreamer has done this. That's something anyway." He put the cylinder in his inner jacket pocket. "I hope we'll have your full cooperation in squelching this sort of thing."

"Positively, Mr. Byrne. With a whole heart."

"I hope so." Byrne spoke with a consciousness of power. "It's not up to me, Mr. Weill, to say what will be done and what won't be done, but this sort of thing"—he tapped the cylinder he had brought—"will make it awfully tempting to impose a really strict censorship on dreamies."

He rose. "Good day, Mr. Weill."

"Good day, Mr. Byrne. I'll hope always for the best."

Francis Belanger burst into Jesse Weill's office in his usual steaming tizzy, his reddish hair disordered and his face aglow with worry and a mild perspiration. He was brought up sharply by the sight of Weill's head cradled in the crook of his elbow and bent on the desk until only the glimmer of white hair was visible.

Belanger swallowed. "Boss?"

Weill's head lifted. "It's you, Frank?"

"What's the matter, boss? Are you sick?"

"I'm old enough to be sick, but I'm on my feet. Staggering, but on my feet. A government man was here."

"What did he want?"

"He threatens censorship. He brought a sample of what's going round. Cheap dreamies for bottle parties."

"God damn!" said Belanger, feelingly.

"The only trouble is that morality makes for good campaign fodder. They'll be hitting out everywhere. And to tell the truth, we're vulnerable, Frank."

"We are? Our stuff is clean. We play up adventure and romance."

Weill thrust out his lower lip and wrinkled his forehead. "Between us, Frank, we don't have to make believe. Clean? It depends on how you look at it. It's not for publication, maybe, but you know and I know that every dreamie has its Freudian connotations. You can't deny it."

"Sure, if you *look* for it. If you're a psychiatrist—"

"If you're an ordinary person, too. The ordinary observer doesn't know it's there and maybe he couldn't tell a phallic symbol from a mother image even if you pointed them out. Still, his subconscious knows. And it's the connotations that make many a dreamie click."

"All right, what's the government going to do? Clean up the subconscious?"

"It's a problem. I don't know what they're going to do. What we have on our side, and what I'm mainly depending on, is the fact that the public loves its dreamies and

won't give them up.—Meanwhile, what did you come in for? You want to see me about something, I suppose?”

Belanger tossed an object onto Weill's desk and shoved his shirt-tail deeper into his trousers.

Weill broke open the glistening plastic cover and took out the enclosed cylinder. At one end was engraved in a too-fancy script in pastel blue: *Along the Himalayan Trail*. It bore the mark of Luster-Think.

“The Competitor's Product.” Weill said it with capitals and his lips twitched. “It hasn't been published yet. Where did you get it, Frank?”

“Never mind. I just want you to absorb it.”

Weill sighed. “Today, everyone wants me to absorb dreams, Frank, it's not dirty?”

Belanger said testily, “It has your Freudian symbols. Narrow crevasses between the mountain peaks. I hope that won't bother you.”

“I'm an old man. It stopped bothering me years ago, but that other thing was so poorly done, it hurt.—All right, let's see what you've got here.”

Again the recorder. Again the unfreezer over his skull and at the temples. This time, Weill rested back in his chair for fifteen minutes or more, while Francis Belanger went hurriedly through two cigarettes.

When Weill removed the headpiece and blinked dream out of his eyes, Belanger said, “Well, what's your reaction, boss?”

Weill corrugated his forehead. “It's not for me. It was repetitious. With competition like this, Dreams, Inc. doesn't have to worry yet.”

“That's your mistake, boss. Luster-Think's going to win with stuff like this. We've got to do something.”

“Now, Frank—”

“No, you listen. This is the coming thing.”

“This?” Weill stared with half-humorous dubiety at the cylinder. “It's amateurish. It's repetitious. Its overtones are very unsubtle. The snow had a distinct lemon sherbet taste. Who tastes lemon sherbet in snow these days, Frank? In the old days, yes. Twenty years ago, maybe. When

Lyman Harrison first made his Snow Symphonies for sale down south, it was a big thing. Sherbet and candy-striped mountain tops and sliding down chocolate-covered cliffs. It's slapstick, Frank. These days it doesn't go."

"Because," said Belanger, "you're not up with the times, boss, I've got to talk to you straight. When you started the dreamie business, when you bought up the basic patents and began putting them out, dreamies were luxury stuff. The market was small and individual. You could afford to turn out specialized dreamies and sell them to people at high prices."

"I know," said Weill, "and we've kept that up. But also we've opened a rental business for the masses."

"Yes, we have and it's not enough. Our dreamies have subtlety, yes. They can be used over and over again. The tenth time you're still finding new things, still getting new enjoyment. But how many people are connoisseurs? And another thing. Our stuff is strongly individualized. They're First Person."

"Well?"

"Well, Luster-Think is opening dream-palaces. They've opened one with three hundred booths in Nashville. You walk in, take your seat, put on your unfreezer and get your dream. Everyone in the audience gets the same one."

"I've heard of it, Frank, and it's been done before. It didn't work the first time and it won't work now. You want to know why it won't work? Because in the first place, dreaming is a private thing. Do you like your neighbor to know what you're dreaming? In the second place, in a dream palace the dreams have to start on schedule, don't they? So the dreamer has to dream not when he wants to but when some palace manager says he should. Finally, a dream one person likes, another person doesn't like. In those three hundred booths, I guarantee you, a hundred and fifty people are dissatisfied. And if they're dissatisfied, they won't come back."

Slowly, Belanger rolled up his sleeves and opened his collar. "Boss," he said, "you're talking through your hat. What's the use of proving they won't work? They *are* work-

ing. The word came through today that Luster-Think is breaking ground for a thousand-booth palace in St. Louis. People can get used to public dreaming, if everyone else in the same room is having the same dream. And they can adjust themselves to having it at a given time, as long as it's cheap and convenient.

"Damn it, boss, it's a social affair. A boy and a girl go to a dream-palace and absorb some cheap romantic thing with stereotyped overtones and commonplace situations, but still they come out with stars sprinkling their hair. They've had the same dream together. They've gone through identical sloppy emotions. They're *in tune*, boss. You bet they go back to the dream-palace, and all their friends go, too."

"And if they don't like the dream?"

"That's the point. That's the nub of the whole thing. They're bound to like it. If you prepare Hillary specials with wheels within wheels within wheels, with surprise twists on the third-level undertones, with clever shifts of significance and all the other things we're so proud of, why, naturally, it won't appeal to everyone. Specialized dreamies are for specialized tastes. But Luster-Think is turning out simple jobs in Third Person so both sexes can be hit at once. Like what you've just absorbed. Simple, repetitious, commonplace. They're aiming at the lowest common denominator. No one will love it, maybe, but no one will hate it."

Weill sat silent for a long time and Belanger watched him. Then Weill said, "Frank, I started on quality and I'm staying there. Maybe, you're right. Maybe dream-palaces are the coming thing. If so we'll open them, but we'll use good stuff. Maybe Luster-Think underestimates ordinary people. Let's go slowly and not panic. I have based all my policies on the theory that there's always a market for quality. Sometimes, my boy, it would surprise you how big a market."

"Boss—"

The sounding of the intercom interrupted Belanger.

"What is it, Ruth?" said Weill.

The voice of his secretary said, "It's Mr. Hillary, sir."

He wants to see you right away. He says it's important."

"Hillary?" Weill's voice registered shock. Then, "Wait five minutes, Ruth, then send him in."

Weill turned to Belanger. "Today, Frank, is definitely not one of my good days. A dreamer should be at home with his thinker. And Hillary's our best dreamer, so he especially should be at home. What do you suppose is wrong with him?"

Belanger, still brooding over Luster-Think and dream-palaces, said shortly, "Call him in and find out."

"In one minute. Tell me, how was his last dream? I haven't absorbed the one that came in last week."

Belanger came down to earth. He wrinkled his nose. "Not so good."

"Why not?"

"It was ragged. Too jumpy. I don't mind sharp transitions for the liveliness, you know, but there's got to be some connection, even if only on a deep level."

"Is it a total loss?"

"No Hillary dream is a *total* loss. It took a lot of editing though. We cut it down quite a bit and spliced in some odd pieces he'd sent us now and then. You know, detached scenes. It's still not Grade A, but it will pass."

"You told him about this, Frank?"

"Think I'm crazy, boss? Think I'm going to say a harsh word to a dreamer?"

And at that point the door opened and Weill's comely young secretary smiled Sherman Hillary into the office.

Sherman Hillary, at the age of 31, could have been recognized as a dreamer by anyone. His eyes, though unspectacled, had nevertheless the misty look of one who either needs glasses or who rarely focuses on anything mundane. He was of average height but underweight, with black hair that needed cutting, a narrow chin, a pale skin and a troubled look.

He muttered, "Hello, Mr. Weill," and half-nodded in hangdog fashion in the direction of Belanger.

Weill said, heartily, "Sherman, my boy, you look fine.

What's the matter? A dream is cooking only so-so at home? You're worried about it?—Sit down, sit down."

The dreamer did, sitting at the edge of the chair and holding his thighs stiffly together as though to be ready for instant obedience to a possible order to stand up once more.

He said, "I've come to tell you, Mr. Weill, I'm quitting."
"Quitting?"

"I don't want to dream anymore, Mr. Weill."

Weill's old face looked older now than at any time during the day. "Why, Sherman?"

The dreamer's lips twisted. He blurted out, "Because I'm not *living*, Mr. Weill. Everything passes me by. It wasn't so bad at first. It was even relaxing. I'd dream evenings, weekends when I felt like it or any other time. And when I felt like it I wouldn't. But now, Mr. Weill, I'm an old pro. You tell me I'm one of the best in the business and the industry looks to me to think up new subtleties and new changes on the old reliables like the flying reveries, and the worm-turning skits."

Weill said, "And is anyone better than you, Sherman? Your little sequence on leading an orchestra is selling steadily after ten years."

"All right, Mr. Weill. I've done my part. It's gotten so I don't go out any more. I neglect my wife. My little girl doesn't know me. Last week we went to a dinner party—Sarah made me—and I don't remember a bit of it. Sarah says I was sitting on the couch all evening just staring at nothing and humming. She said everyone kept looking at me. She cried all night. I'm tired of things like that, Mr. Weill. I want to be a normal person and live in this world. I promised her I'd quit and I will, so it's goodbye, Mr. Weill." Hillary stood up and held out his hand awkwardly.

Weill waved it gently away. "If you want to quit, Sherman, it's all right. But do an old man a favor and let me explain something to you."

"I'm not going to change my mind," said Hillary.

"I'm not going to try to make you. I just want to explain something. I'm an old man and even before you were born

I was in this business, so I like to talk about it. Humor me, Sherman? Please?"

Hillary sat down. His teeth clamped down on his lower lip and he stared sullenly at his fingernails.

Weill said, "Do you know what a dreamer is, Sherman? Do you know what he means to ordinary people? Do you know what it is to be like me, like Frank Belanger, like your wife Sarah? To have crippled minds that can't imagine, that can't build up thoughts? People like myself, ordinary people, would like to escape just once in a while this life of ours. We can't. We need help.

"In olden times it was books, plays, movies, radio, television. They gave us make-believe, but that wasn't important. What *was* important was that for a little while our own imaginations were stimulated. We could think of handsome lovers and beautiful princesses. We could be attractive, witty, strong, capable—everything we weren't.

"But always the passing of the dream from dreamer to absorber was not perfect. It had to be translated into words in one way or another. The best dreamer in the world might not be able to get any of it into words. And the best writer in the world could put only the smallest part of his dreams into words. You understand?

"But now, with dream-recording, any man can dream. You, Sherman, and a handful of men like you supply those dreams directly and exactly. It's straight from your head into ours, full strength. You dream for a hundred million people every time you dream. You dream a hundred million dreams at once. This is a great thing, my boy. You give all those people a glimpse of something they could not have by themselves."

Hillary mumbled, "I've done my share." He rose desperately to his feet. "I'm through. I don't care what you say. And if you want to sue me for breaking our contract, go ahead and sue. I don't care."

Weill stood up too. "Would I sue you?—Ruth," he spoke into the intercom, "bring in our copy of Mr. Hillary's contract."

He waited. So did Hillary and Belanger. Weill smiled

faintly and his yellowed fingers drummed softly on his desk.

His secretary brought in the contract. Weill took it, showed its face to Hillary and said, "Sherman, my boy, unless you *want* to be with me, it's not right you should stay."

Then before Belanger could make more than the beginning of a horrified gesture to stop him, he tore the contract into four pieces and tossed them down the waste-chute. "That's all."

Hillary's hand shot out to seize Weill's. "Thanks, Mr. Weill," he said, earnestly, his voice husky. "You've always treated me very well, and I'm grateful. I'm sorry it had to be like this."

"It's all right, my boy. It's all right."

Half in tears, still muttering thanks, Sherman Hillary left.

"For the love of Pete, boss, why did you let him go?" demanded Belanger. "Don't you see the game? He'll be going straight to Luster-Think. They've bought him off."

Weill raised his hand. "You're wrong. You're quite wrong. I know the boy and this would not be his style. Besides," he added dryly, "Ruth is a good secretary and she knows what to bring me when I ask for a dreamer's contract. The real contract is still in the safe, believe me."

"Meanwhile, a fine day I've had. I had to argue with a father to give me a chance at new talent, with a government man to avoid censorship, with you to keep from adopting fatal policies, and now with my best dreamer to keep him from leaving. The father I probably won out over. The government man and you, I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no. But about Sherman Hillary, at least, there is no question. The dreamer will be back."

"How do you know?"

Weill smiled at Belanger and crinkled his cheeks into a network of fine lines. "Frank, my boy, you know how to edit dreamies so you think you know all the tools and machines of the trade. But let me tell you something. The

most important tool in the dreamie business is the dreamer himself. He is the one you have to understand most of all, and I understand them.

"Listen. When I was a youngster—there were no dreamies then—I knew a fellow who wrote television scripts. He would complain to me bitterly that when someone met him for the first time and found out who he was, they would say: *Where do you get those crazy ideas?*

"They honestly didn't know. To them it was an impossibility to even think of one of them. So what could my friend say? He used to talk to me about it and tell me: 'Could I say, "I don't know"? When I go to bed I can't sleep for ideas dancing in my head. When I shave I cut myself; when I talk I lose track of what I'm saying; when I drive I take my life in my hands. And always because ideas, situations, dialogs are spinning and twisting in my mind. I can't tell you where I get my ideas. Can you tell me, maybe, your trick of *not* getting ideas, so I, too, can have a little peace?'

"You see, Frank, how it is. *You* can stop work here anytime. So can I. This is our job, not our life. But not Sherman Hillary. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he'll dream. While he lives, he must think; while he thinks, he must dream. We don't hold him prisoner, our contract isn't an iron wall for him. His own skull is his prisoner. He'll be back. What can he do?"

Belanger shrugged. "If what you say is right, I'm sort of sorry for the guy."

Weill nodded sadly, "I'm sorry for all of them. Through the years, I've found out one thing. It's their business: making people happy. *Other* people."

THE COUNTRY OF THE KIND

by
Damon Knight

You can go back to Plato's "Republic," or further back to the Biblical "land of milk and honey," and maybe earlier still, tracing the history of Utopias. In the last two centuries, any number of attempts to found actual Utopian colonies failed ruinously; and almost always for the reason that the people who tried it, however much the ideals of cooperation and unity may have appealed to them, were not psychologically prepared to live in such a world.

But if the perfect society could work—if people could live in happy harmony together—what would that world be like? And what would it be, especially, for one single lonely misfit in Utopia?

Damon Knight has always had a facility with words and a cleverness with ideas that made even his lesser stories well worth reading. In the past year or two, I have seen no "slight" stories from him; this one, certainly, goes deep inside.

THE ATTENDANT at the car lot was daydreaming when I pulled up—a big, lazy-looking man in black satin chequered down the front. I was wearing scarlet, myself; it suited my mood. I got out, almost on his toes.

"Park or storage?" he asked automatically, turning around. Then he realized who I was, and ducked his head

This story is slightly revised from the original magazine version.

away.

"Neither," I told him.

There was a hand torch on a shelf in the repair shed right behind him. I got it and came back. I kneeled down to where I could reach behind the front wheel, and ignited the torch. I turned it on the axle and suspension. They glowed cherry red, then white, and fused together. Then I got up and turned the flame on both tires until the rubberoid stank and sizzled and melted down to the pavement. The attendant didn't say anything.

I left him there, looking at the mess on his nice clean concrete.

It had been a nice car, too; but I could get another any time. And I felt like walking. I went down the winding road, sleepy in the afternoon sunlight, dappled with shade and smelling of cool leaves. You couldn't see the houses; they were all sunken or hidden by shrubbery, or a little of both. That was the fad I'd heard about; it was what I'd come here to see. Not that anything the dulls did would be worth looking at.

I turned off at random and crossed a rolling lawn, went through a second hedge of hawthorn in blossom, and came out next to a big sunken games court.

The tennis net was up, and two couples were going at it, just working up a little sweat—young, about half my age, all four of them. Three dark-haired, one blonde. They were evenly matched, and both couples played well together; they were enjoying themselves.

I watched for a minute. But by then the nearest two were beginning to sense I was there, anyhow. I walked down onto the court, just as the blonde was about to serve. She looked at me frozen across the net, poised on tiptoe. The others stood.

"Off," I told them. "Game's over."

I watched the blonde. She was not especially pretty, as they go, but compactly and gracefully put together. She came down slowly flatfooted without awkwardness, and tucked the racquet under her arm; then the surprise was over and she was trotting off the court after the other three.

I followed their voices around the curve of the path, between towering masses of lilacs, inhaling the sweetness, until I came to what looked like a little sunning spot. There was a sundial, and a birdbath, and towels lying around on the grass. One couple, the dark-haired pair, was still in sight farther down the path, heads bobbing along. The other couple had disappeared.

I found the handle in the grass without any trouble. The mechanism responded, and an oblong section of turf rose up. It was the stair I had, not the elevator, but that was all right. I ran down the steps and into the first door I saw, and was in the top-floor lounge, an oval room lit with diffused simulated sunlight from above. The furniture was all comfortably bloated, sprawling and ugly; the carpet was deep, and there was a fresh flower scent in the air.

The blonde was over at the near end with her back to me, studying the autochef keyboard. She was half out of her playsuit. She pushed it the rest of the way down and stepped out of it, then turned and saw me.

She was surprised again; she hadn't thought I might follow her down.

I got up close before it occurred to her to move; then it was too late. She knew she couldn't get away from me; she closed her eyes and leaned back against the paneling, turning a little pale. Her lips and her golden brows went up in the middle.

I looked her over and told her a few uncomplimentary things about herself. She trembled, but didn't answer. On impulse, I leaned over and dialed the autochef to hot cheese sauce. I cut the safety out of circuit and put the quantity dial all the way up. I dialed *soup tureen* and then *punch bowl*.

The stuff began to come out in about a minute, steaming hot. I took the tureens and splashed them up and down the wall on either side of her. Then when the first punch bowl came out I used the empty bowls as scoops. I clotted the carpet with the stuff; I made streamers of it all along the walls, and dumped puddles into what furniture I could

reach. Where it cooled it would harden, and where it hardened it would cling.

I wanted to splash it across her body, but it would've hurt, and we couldn't have that. The punch bowls of hot sauce were still coming out of the autochef, crowding each other around the vent. I punched *cancel*, and then *port wine*.

It came out well chilled in open bottles. I took the first one and had my arm back just about to throw a nice line of the stuff right across her midriff, when a voice said behind me:

"Watch out for cold wine."

My arm twitched and a little stream of the wine splashed across her thighs. She was ready for it; her eyes had opened at the voice, and she barely jumped.

I whirled around, fighting mad. The man was standing there where he had come out of the stair well. He was thinner in the face than most, bronzed, wide-chested, with alert blue eyes. If it hadn't been for him, I knew it would have worked—the blonde would have mistaken the cold splash for a hot one.

I could hear the scream in my mind, and I wanted it.

I took a step toward him, and my foot slipped. I went down clumsily, wrenching one knee. I got up shaking and tight all over. I wasn't in control of myself. I screamed, "You—you—" I turned and got one of the punch bowls and lifted it in both hands, heedless of how the hot sauce was slopping over onto my wrists, and I had it almost in the air toward him when the sickness took me—that damned buzzing in my head, louder, louder, drowning everything out.

When I came to, they were both gone. I got up off the floor, weak as death, and staggered over to the nearest chair. My clothes were slimed and sticky. I wanted to die. I wanted to drop into that dark furry hole that was yawning for me and never come up; but I made myself stay awake and get out of the chair.

Going down in the elevator, I almost blacked out again. The blonde and the thin man weren't in any of the second-

floor bedrooms. I made sure of that, and then I emptied the closets and bureau drawers onto the floor, dragged the whole mess into one of the bathrooms and stuffed the tub with it, then turned on the water.

I tried the third floor: maintenance and storage. It was empty. I turned the furnace on and set the thermostat up as high as it would go. I disconnected all the safety circuits and alarms. I opened the freezer doors and dialed them to defrost. I propped the stair-well door open and went back up in the elevator.

On the second floor I stopped long enough to open the stairway door there—the water was halfway toward it, creeping across the floor—and then searched the top floor. No one was there. I opened book reels and threw them unwinding across the room; I would have done more, but I could hardly stand. I got up to the surface and collapsed on the lawn: that furry pit swallowed me up, dead and drowned.

While I slept, water poured down the open stair well and filled the third level. Thawing food packages floated out into the rooms. Water seeped into wall panels and machine housings; circuits shorted and fuses blew. The air conditioning stopped, but the pile kept heating. The water rose.

Spoiled food, floating supplies, grimy water surged up the stair well. The second and first levels were bigger and would take longer to fill, but they'd fill. Rugs, furnishings, clothing, all the things in the house would be waterlogged and ruined. Probably the weight of so much water would shift the house, rupture water pipes and other fluid intakes. It would take a repair crew more than a day just to clean up the mess. The house itself was done for, not repairable. The blonde and the thin man would never live in it again.

Serve them right.

The dulls could build another house; they built like beavers. There was only one of me in the world.

The earliest memory I have is of some woman, prob-

ably the creshmother, staring at me with an expression of shock and horror. Just that. I've tried to remember what happened directly before or after, but I can't. Before, there's nothing but the dark formless shaft of no-memory that runs back to birth. Afterward, the big calm.

From my fifth year, it must have been, to my fifteenth, everything I can remember floats in a pleasant dim sea. Nothing was terribly important. I was languid and soft; I drifted. Waking merged into sleep.

In my fifteenth year it was the fashion in love-play for the young people to pair off for months or longer. "Loving steady," we called it. I remember how the older people protested that it was unhealthy; but we were all normal juniors, and nearly as free as adults under the law.

All but me.

The first steady girl I had was named Elen. She had blonde hair, almost white, worn long; her lashes were dark and her eyes pale green. Startling eyes: they didn't look as if they were looking at you. They looked blind.

Several times she gave me strange startled glances, something between fright and anger. Once it was because I held her too tightly, and hurt her; other times, it seemed to be for nothing at all.

In our group, a pairing that broke up sooner than four weeks was a little suspect—there must be something wrong with one partner or both, or the pairing would have lasted longer.

Four weeks and a day after Elen and I made our pairing, she told me she was breaking it.

I'd thought I was ready. But I felt the room spin half around me till the wall came against my palm and stopped.

The room had been in use as a hobby chamber; there was a rack of plasticraft knives under my hand. I took one without thinking, and when I saw it I thought, *I'll frighten her.*

And I saw the startled, half-angry look in her pale eyes as I went toward her; but this is curious: she wasn't looking at the knife. She was looking at my face.

The elders found me later with the blood on me, and

put me into a locked room. Then it was my turn to be frightened, because I realized for the first time that it was possible for a human being to do what I had done. And if I could do it to Elen, I thought, surely they could do it to me.

But they couldn't. They set me free: they had to.

And it was then I understood that I was the king of the world.

Something else in me, that had been suppressed and forgotten, rose up with my first blow struck in anger. The sculpture began years afterward, as an accident; but in that moment I was free, and I was an artist.

One winter, in the AC Archives in Denver, I found a storeroom full of old printed books. I spent months there, reading them, because until then I'd thought I had invented sculpture and drawing. The thing I chiefly wanted to know was, why had it stopped? There was no answer in so many words in any of the books. But reading the histories of those times before the Interregnum, I found one thing that might explain it. Whenever there was a long period of peace and plenty anywhere in the ancient world, art grew poor: decoration, genre painting, imitations of imitations. And as for the great artists, they all belonged to violent periods—Praxiteles, da Vinci, Rembrandt van Rijn, Renoir, Picasso . . .

It had been bred out of the race, evidently. I don't suppose the genetic planners wanted to get rid of it, but they would have shed almost anything to make a homogeneous, rational, sane and healthy world.

So there was only one man to carve the portrait of the Age of Reason. All right; I would have been content, only . . .

The sky was turning clear violet when I woke up, and shadow was spilling out from the hedges. I went down the hill until I saw the ghostly blue of photon tubes glowing in a big oblong, just outside the commerce area. I went that way, by habit.

Other people were lining up at the entrance to show

their books and be admitted. I brushed by them, seeing the shocked faces and feeling their bodies flinch away, and went on into the robing chamber.

Straps, aqualungs, masks and flippers were all for the taking. I stripped, dropping the clothes where I stood, and put the underwater equipment on. I strode out to the poolside, monstrous, like a being from another world. I adjusted the lung and the flippers, and slipped into the water.

Underneath, it was all crystal blue, with the forms of swimmers sliding through it like pale angels. Schools of small fish scattered as I went down. My heart was beating with a painful joy.

Down, far down, I saw a girl slowly undulating through the motions of a sinuous underwater dance, writhing around and around a ribbed column of imitation coral. She had a suction-tipped fish lance in her hand, but she was not using it; she was only dancing, all by herself, down at the bottom of the water.

I swam after her. She was young and delicately made, and when she saw the deliberately clumsy motions I made in imitation of hers, her eyes glinted with amusement behind her mask. She bowed to me in mockery, and slowly glided off with simple, exaggerated movements, like a child's ballet.

I followed. Around her and around I swam, stiff-legged, first more child-like and awkward than she, then subtly parodying her motions; then improvising on them until I was dancing an intricate, mocking dance around her.

I saw her eyes widen. She matched her rhythm to mine, then, and together, apart, together again we coiled the wake of our dancing. At last, exhausted, we clung together where a bridge of plastic coral arched over us. Her cool body was in the bend of my arm; behind two thicknesses of vitrin—a world away!—her eyes were friendly and kind.

There was a moment when, two strangers yet one flesh, we felt our souls speak to one another across that abyss of matter. It was a truncated embrace—we could not kiss, we

could not speak—but her hands lay confidently on my shoulders, and her eyes looked into mine.

That moment had to end. She gestured toward the surface, and left me. I followed her up. I was feeling drowsy and almost at peace, after my sickness. I thought . . . I don't know what I thought.

We rose together at the side of the pool. She turned to me, removing her mask: and her smile stopped, and melted away. She stared at me with a horrified disgust, wrinkling her nose.

"*Pyah!*" she said, and turned, awkward in her flippers. Watching her, I saw her fall into the arms of a white-haired man, and heard her hysterical voice tumbling over itself.

"But don't you remember?" the man's voice rumbled. "You should know it by heart." He turned. "Hal, is there a copy in the clubhouse?"

A murmur answered him, and in a few moments a young man came out holding a slender brown pamphlet.

I knew that pamphlet. I could even have told you what page the white-haired man opened it to; what sentences the girl was reading as I watched.

I waited. I don't know why.

I heard her voice rising: "To think that I let him *touch* me!" And the white-haired man reassured her, the words rumbling, too low to hear. I saw her back straighten. She looked across at me . . . only a few yards in that scented, blue-lit air; a world away . . . and folded up the pamphlet into a hard wad, threw it, and turned on her heel.

The pamphlet landed almost at my feet. I touched it with my toe, and it opened to the page I had been thinking of:

. . . sedation until his 15th year, when for sexual reasons it became no longer practicable. While the advisors and medical staff hesitated, he killed a girl of the group by violence.

And farther down:

The solution finally adopted was three-fold.

1. *A sanction*—the only sanction possible to our humane, permissive society. Excommunication: not to speak to him, touch him willingly, or acknowledge his existence.

2. *A precaution*. Taking advantage of a mild predisposition to epilepsy, a variant of the so-called Kusko analogue technique was employed, to prevent by an epileptic seizure any future act of violence.

3. *A warning*. A careful alteration of his body chemistry was effected to make his exhaled and exuded wastes emit a strongly pungent and offensive odor. In mercy, he himself was rendered unable to detect this smell.

Fortunately, the genetic and environmental accidents which combined to produce this atavism have been fully explained and can never again . . .

The words stopped meaning anything, as they always did at that point. I didn't want to read any farther; it was all nonsense, anyway. I was the king of the world.

I got up and went away, out into the night, blind to the dulls who thronged the rooms I passed.

Two squares away was the commerce area. I found a clothing outlet and went in. All the free clothes in the display cases were drab: those were for worthless floaters, not for me. I went past them to the specials, and found a combination I could stand—silver and blue, with a severe black piping down the tunic. A dull would have said it was "nice." I punched for it. The automatic looked me over with its dull glassy eye, and croaked, "Your contribution book, please."

I could have had a contribution book, for the trouble of stepping out into the street and taking it away from the first passer-by; but I didn't have the patience. I picked up the one-legged table from the refreshment nook, hefted it, and swung it at the cabinet door. The metal shrieked and dented opposite the catch. I swung once more to the same place, and the door sprang open. I pulled out clothing in handfuls till I got a set that would fit me.

I bathed and changed, and then went prowling in the big multi-outlet down the avenue. All those places are arranged pretty much alike, no matter what the local managers do to them. I went straight to the knives, and picked out three in graduated sizes, down to the size of my fingernail. Then I had to take my chances. I tried the furniture department, where I had had good luck once in a while, but this year all they were using was metal. I had to have seasoned wood.

I knew where there was a big cache of cherry wood, in good-sized blocks, in a forgotten warehouse up north at a place called Kootenay. I could have carried some around with me—enough for years—but what for, when the world belonged to me?

It didn't take me long. Down in the workshop section, of all places, I found some antiques—tables and benches, all with wooden tops. While the dulls collected down at the other end of the room, pretending not to notice, I sawed off a good oblong chunk of the smallest bench, and made a base for it out of another.

As long as I was there, it was a good place to work, and I could eat and sleep upstairs, so I stayed.

I knew what I wanted to do. It was going to be a man, sitting, with his legs crossed and his forearms resting down along his calves. His head was going to be tilted back, and his eyes closed, as if he were turning his face up to the sun.

In three days it was finished. The trunk and limbs had a shape that was not man and not wood, but something in between: something that hadn't existed before I made it.

Beauty. That was the old word.

I had carved one of the figure's hands hanging loosely, and the other one curled shut. There had to be a time to stop and say it was finished. I took the smallest knife, the one I had been using to scrape the wood smooth, and cut away the handle and ground down what was left of the shaft to a thin spike. Then I drilled a hole into the wood of the figurine's hand, in the hollow between thumb and curled finger. I fitted the knife blade in there; in the small hand it was a sword.

I cemented it in place. Then I took the sharp blade and stabbed my thumb, and smeared the blade.

I hunted most of that day, and finally found the right place—a niche in an outcropping of striated brown rock, in a little triangular half-wild patch that had been left where two roads forked. Nothing was permanent, of course, in a community like this one that might change its houses every five years or so, to follow the fashion; but this spot had been left to itself for a long time. It was the best I could do.

I had the paper ready: it was one of a batch I had printed up a year ago. The paper was treated, and I knew it would stay legible a long time. I hid a little photo capsule in the back of the niche, and ran the control wire to a staple in the base of the figurine. I put the figurine down on top of the paper, and anchored it lightly to the rock with two spots of all-cement. I had done it so often that it came naturally; I knew just how much cement would hold the figurine steady against a casual hand, but yield to one that really wanted to pull it down.

Then I stepped back to look: and the power and the pity of it made my breath come short, and tears start to my eyes.

Reflected light gleamed fitfully on the dark-stained blade that hung from his hand. He was sitting alone in that niche that closed him in like a coffin. His eyes were shut, and his head tilted back, as if he were turning his face up to the sun.

But only rock was over his head. There was no sun for him.

Hunched on the cool bare ground under a pepper tree, I was looking down across the road at the shadowed niche where my figurine sat.

I was all finished here. There was nothing more to keep me, and yet I couldn't leave.

People walked past now and then—not often. The community seemed half deserted, as if most of the people had flocked off to a surf party somewhere, or a contribution

meeting, or to watch a new house being dug to replace the one I had wrecked. . . There was a little wind blowing toward me, cool and lonesome in the leaves.

Up the other side of the hollow there was a terrace, and on that terrace, half an hour ago, I had seen a brief flash of color—a boy's head, with a red cap on it, moving past and out of sight.

That was why I had to stay. I was thinking how that boy might come down from his terrace and into my road, and passing the little wild triangle of land, see my figurine. I was thinking he might not pass by indifferently, but stop: and go closer to look: and pick up the wooden man: and read what was written on the paper underneath.

I believed that sometime it had to happen. I wanted it so hard that I ached.

My carvings were all over the world, wherever I had wandered. There was one in Congo City, carved of ebony, dusty-black; one on Cyprus, of bone; one in New Bombay, of shell; one in Chang-teh, of jade.

They were like signs printed in red and green, in a color-blind world. Only the one I was looking for would ever pick one of them up, and read the message I knew by heart.

TO YOU WHO CAN SEE, the first sentence said. I OFFER YOU A WORLD.

There was a flash of color up on the terrace. I stiffened. A minute later, here it came again, from a different direction: it was the boy, clambering down the slope, brilliant against the green, with his red sharp-billed cap like a woodpecker's head.

I held my breath.

He came toward me through the fluttering leaves, ticked off by pencils of sunlight as he passed. He was a brown boy, I could see at this distance, with a serious thin face. His ears stuck out, flickering pink with the sun behind them, and his elbow and knee pads made him look knobby.

He reached the fork in the road, and chose the path on my side. I huddled into myself as he came nearer. *Let him see it, let him not see me*, I thought fiercely.

My fingers closed around a stone.

He was nearer, walking jerkily with his hands in his pockets, watching his feet mostly.

When he was almost opposite me, I threw the stone.

It rustled through the leaves below the niche in the rock. The boy's head turned. He stopped, staring. I think he saw the figurine then. I'm sure he saw it.

He took one step.

"Rishal" came floating down from the terrace.

And he looked up. "Here," he piped.

I saw the woman's head, tiny at the top of the terrace. She called something I didn't hear; I was standing up, squeezed tight with anger.

Then the wind shifted. It blew from me to the boy. He whirled around, his eyes big, and clapped a hand to his nose.

"Oh, what a stench!"

He turned to shout, "Coming!" and then he was gone, hurrying back up the road, into the unstable blur of green.

My one chance, ruined. He would have seen the image, I knew, if it hadn't been for that damned woman, and the wind shifting. . . . They were all against me, people, wind and all.

And the figurine still sat, blind eyes turned up to the rocky sky.

There was something inside me that told me to take my disappointment and go away from there, and not come back.

I knew I would be sorry. I did it anyway: took the image out of the niche, and the paper with it, and climbed the slope. At the top I heard his clear voice laughing.

There was a thing that might have been an ornamental mound, or the camouflaged top of a buried house. I went around it, tripping over my own feet, and came upon the boy kneeling on the turf. He was playing with a brown and white puppy.

He looked up with the laughter going out of his face. There was no wind, and he could smell me. I knew it was bad. No wind, and the puppy to distract him—everything

about it was wrong. But I went to him blindly anyhow, and fell on one knee, and shoved the figurine at his face.

"Look—" I said.

He went over backwards in his hurry: he couldn't even have seen the image, except as a brown blur coming at him. He scrambled up, with the puppy whining and yapping around his heels, and ran for the mound.

I was up after him, clawing up moist earth and grass as I rose. In the other hand I still had the image clutched, and the paper with it.

A door popped open and swallowed him and popped shut again in my face. With the flat of my hand I beat the vines around it until I hit the doorplate by accident and the door opened. I dived in, shouting, "Wait," and was in a spiral passage, lit pearl-gray, winding downward. Down I went headlong, and came out at the wrong door—an underground conservatory, humid and hot under the yellow lights, with dripping rank leaves in long rows. I went down the aisle raging, overturning the tanks, until I came to a vestibule and an elevator.

Down I went again to the third level and a labyrinth of guest rooms, all echoing, all empty. At last I found a ramp leading upward, past the conservatory, and at the end of it voices.

The door was clear vitrin, and I paused on the near side of it looking and listening. There was the boy, and a woman old enough to be his mother, just—sister or cousin, more likely—and an elderly woman in a hard chair holding the puppy. The room was comfortable and tasteless, like other rooms.

I saw the shock grow on their faces as I burst in: it was always the same, they knew I would like to kill them, but they never expected that I would come uninvited into a house. It was not done.

There was that boy, so close I could touch him, but the shock of all of them was quivering in the air, smothering, like a blanket that would deaden my voice. I felt I had to shout.

"Everything they tell you is lies!" I said. "See here—here,

this is the truth!" I had the figurine in front of his eyes, but he didn't see.

"Risha, go below," said the young woman quietly. He turned to obey, quick as a ferret. I got in front of him again. "Stay," I said, breathing hard. "Look—"

"Remember, Risha, don't speak," said the woman.

I couldn't stand any more. Where the boy went I don't know; I ceased to see him. With the image in one hand and the paper with it, I leaped at the woman. I was almost quick enough; I almost reached her; but the buzzing took me in the middle of a step, louder, louder, like the end of the world.

It was the second time that week. When I came to, I was sick and too faint to move for a long time.

The house was silent. They had gone, of course . . . the house had been defiled, having me in it. They wouldn't live here again, but would build elsewhere.

My eyes blurred. After a while I stood up and looked around at the room. The walls were hung with a gray close-woven cloth that looked as if it would tear, and I thought of ripping it down in strips, breaking furniture, stuffing carpets and bedding into the oubliette. . . . But I didn't have the heart for it. I was too tired.

At last I stooped and picked up the figurine, and the paper that was supposed to go under it—crumpled now, with the forlorn look of a message that someone has thrown away unread.

I smoothed it out and read the last part.

**YOU CAN SHARE THE WORLD WITH ME.
THEY CAN'T STOP YOU. STRIKE NOW—PICK UP
A SHARP THING AND STAB, OR A HEAVY
THING AND CRUSH. THAT'S ALL. THAT WILL
MAKE YOU FREE. ANYONE CAN DO IT.**

Anyone. Anyone.

THE PUBLIC HATING

by
Steve Allen

I can hardly presume to tell the American public anything about Steve Allen—except to point with delight (being an Allen fan anyhow) and say: "Look, maw! He can writel"

This story follows the Knight because it is also about hate, and because it is not at all about Utopia.

THE WEATHER was a little cloudy on that September 9, 1978, and here and there in the crowds that surged up the ramps into the stadium people were looking at the sky and then at their neighbors and squinting and saying, "Hope she doesn't rain."

On television the weatherman had forecast slight cloudiness but no showers. It was not cold. All over the neighborhood surrounding the stadium, people poured out of street-cars and busses and subways. In ant-like lines they crawled across streets, through turnstiles, up stairways, along ramps, through gates, down aisles.

Laughing and shoving restlessly, damp-palmed with excitement, they came shuffling into the great concrete bowl, some stopping to go to the restrooms, some buying popcorn, some taking free pamphlets from the uniformed attendants.

Everything was free this particular day. No tickets had been sold for the event. The public proclamations had simply been made in the newspapers and on TV, and over 65,000 people had responded.

For weeks, of course, the papers had been suggesting

that the event would take place. All during the trial, even as early as the selection of the jury, the columnists had slyly hinted at the inevitability of the outcome. But it had only been official since yesterday. The television networks had actually gotten a slight jump on the papers. At six o'clock the government had taken over all network facilities for a brief five-minute period during which the announcement was made.

"We have all followed with great interest," the Premier had said, looking calm and handsome in a gray double-breasted suit, "the course of the trial of Professor Ketteridge. Early this afternoon the jury returned a verdict of guilty. This verdict having been confirmed within the hour by the Supreme Court, in the interests of time-saving, the White House has decided to make the usual prompt official announcement. There will be a public hating tomorrow. The time: 2:30 P.M. The place: Yankee Stadium in New York City. Your assistance is earnestly requested. Those of you in the New York area will find. . . ."

The voice had gone on, filling in other details, and in the morning, the early editions of the newspapers included pictures captioned, "Bronx couple first in line," and "Students wait all night to view hating" and "Early birds."

By one-thirty in the afternoon there was not an empty seat in the stadium and people were beginning to fill up a few of the aisles. Special police began to block off the exits and word was sent down to the street that no more people could be admitted. Hawkers slipped through the crowd selling cold beer and hot-dogs.

Sitting just back of what would have been first base had the Yankees not been playing in Cleveland, Frederic Traub stared curiously at the platform in the middle of the field. It was about twice the size of a prize-fighting ring. In the middle of it there was a small raised section on which was placed a plain wooden kitchen chair.

To the left of the chair there were seating accommodations for a small group of dignitaries. Downstage, so to speak, there was a speaker's lectern and a battery of micro-

phones. The platform was hung with bunting and pennants.

The crowd was beginning to hum ominously.

At two minutes after two o'clock a small group of men filed out onto the field from a point just back of home plate. The crowd buzzed more loudly for a moment and then burst into applause. The men carefully climbed a few wooden steps, walked in single file across the platform, and seated themselves in the chairs set out for them. Traub turned around and was interested to observe high in the press box, the winking red lights of television cameras.

"Remarkable," said Traub softly to his companion.

"I suppose," said the man. "But effective."

"I guess that's right," said Traub. "Still, it all seems a little strange to me. We do things rather differently."

"That's what makes horse-racing," said his companion.

Traub listened for a moment to the voices around him. Surprisingly, no one seemed to be discussing the business at hand. Baseball, movies, the weather, gossip, personal small-talk, a thousand-and-one subjects were introduced. It was almost as if they were trying not to mention the hating.

His friend's voice broke in on Traub's reverie.

"Think you'll be okay when we get down to business? I've seen 'em keel over."

"I'll be all right," said Traub. Then he shook his head. "But I still can't believe it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know, the whole thing. How it started. How you found you could do it."

"Beats the hell out of me," said the other man. "I think it was that guy at Duke University first came up with the idea. The mind over matter thing has been around for a long time, of course. But this guy, he was the first one to prove scientifically that mind can control matter."

"Did it with dice, I believe," Traub said.

"Yeah, that's it. First he found some guys who could drop a dozen or so dice down a chute of some kind and ac-

tually control the direction they'd take. Then they discovered the secret—it was simple. The guys who could control the dice were simply the guys who *thought* they could.

"Then one time they got the idea of taking the dice into an auditorium and having about 2,000 people concentrate on forcing the dice one way or the other. That did it. It was the most natural thing in the world when you think of it. If one horse can pull a heavy load so far and so fast it figures that 10 horses can pull it a lot farther and a lot faster. They had those dice fallin' where they wanted 'em 80 percent of the time."

"When did they first substitute a living organism for the dice?" Traub asked.

"Damned if I know," said the man. "It was quite a few years ago and at first the government sort of clamped down on the thing. There was a little last-ditch fight from the churches, I think. But they finally realized you couldn't stop it."

"Is this an unusually large crowd?"

"Not for a political prisoner. You take a rapist or a murderer now, some of them don't pull more than maybe twenty, thirty thousand. The people just don't get stirred up enough."

The sun had come out from behind a cloud now and Traub watched silently as large map-shaped shadows moved majestically across the grass.

"She's warming up," someone said.

"That's right," a voice agreed. "Gonna be real nice."

Traub leaned forward and lowered his head as he retied the laces on his right shoe and in the next instant he was shocked to attention by a guttural roar from the crowd that vibrated the floor.

In distant right center-field, three men were walking toward the platform. Two were walking together, the third was slouched in front of them, head down, his gait unsteady.

Traub had thought he was going to be all right but now, looking at the tired figure being prodded toward second base, looking at the bare, bald head, he began to

feel slightly sick.

It seemed to take forever before the two guards jostled the prisoner up the stairs and toward the small kitchen chair.

When he reached it and seated himself the crowd roared again. A tall, distinguished man stepped to the speaker's lectern and cleared his throat, raising his right hand in an appeal for quiet. "All right," he said, "all right."

The mob slowly fell silent. Traub clasped his hands tightly together. He felt a little ashamed.

"All right," said the speaker. "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the President of the United States I welcome you to another Public Hating. This particular affair," he said, "as you know is directed against the man who was yesterday judged guilty in United States District Court here in New York City—Professor Arthur Ketteridge."

At the mention of Ketteridge's name the crowd made a noise like an earthquake-rumble. Several pop-bottles were thrown, futilely, from the center-field bleachers.

"We will begin in just a moment," said the speaker, "but first I should like to introduce the Reverend Charles Fuller, of the Park Avenue Reborn Church, who will make the invocation."

A small man with glasses stepped forward, replaced the first speaker at the microphone, closed his eyes, and threw back his head.

"Our Heavenly Father," he said, "to whom we are indebted for all the blessings of this life, grant, we beseech Thee, that we act today in justice and in the spirit of truth. Grant, O Lord, we pray Thee, that what we are about to do here today will render us the humble servants of Thy divine will. For it is written *the wages of sin is death*. Search deep into this man's heart for the seed of repentance if there be such, and if there be not, plant it therein, O Lord, in Thy goodness and mercy."

There was a slight pause. The Reverend Fuller coughed and then said, "Amen."

The crowd, which had stood quietly during the prayer, now sat down and began to buzz again.

The first speaker rose. "All right," he said. "You know we all have a job to do, And you know why we have to do it.

"Yes!" screamed thousands of voices.

"Then let us get to the business at hand. At this time I would like to introduce to you a very great American who, to use the old phrase, needs no introduction. Former president of Harvard University, current adviser to the Secretary of State, ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Howard S. Weltmer!"

A wave of applause vibrated the air.

Dr. Weltmer stepped forward, shook hands with the speaker, and adjusted the microphone. "Thank you," he said. "Now, we won't waste any more time here since what we are about to do will take every bit of our energy and concentration if it is to be successfully accomplished. I ask you all," he said, "to direct your unwavering attention toward the man seated in the chair to my left here, a man who in my opinion is the most despicable criminal of our time—Professor Arthur Ketteridge!"

The mob shrieked.

"I ask you," said Weltmer, "to rise. That's it, everybody stand up. Now, I want every one of you . . . I understand we have upwards of seventy thousand people here today . . . I want every single one of you to stare directly at this fiend in human form, Ketteridge. I want you to let him know by the wondrous power that lies in the strength of your emotional reservoirs, I want you to let him know that he is a criminal, that he is worse than a murderer, that he has committed treason, that he is not loved by anyone, anywhere in the universe, and that he is, rather, despised with a vigor equal in heat to the power of the sun itself!"

People around Traub were shaking their fists now. Their eyes were narrowed their mouths turned down at the corners. A woman fainted.

"Come on," shouted Weltmer. "Let's feel it!"

Under the spell of the speaker Traub was suddenly hor-

rified to find that his blood was racing, his heart pounding. He felt anger surging up in him. He could not believe he hated Ketteridge. But he could not deny he hated something.

"On the souls of your mothers," Weltmer was saying, "on the future of your children, out of your love for your country, I demand of you that you unleash your power to despise. I want you to become ferocious. I want you to become as the beasts of the jungle, as furious as they in the defense of their homes. "Do you hate this man?"

"Yes!" roared the crowd.

"Fiend!" cried Weltmer, "Enemy of the people— Do you hear, Ketteridge?"

Traub watched in dry-mouthed fascination as the slumped figure in the chair straightened up convulsively and jerked at his collar. At this first indication that their power was reaching home the crowd roared to a new peak of excitement.

"We plead," said Weltmer, "with you people watching today on your television sets, to join with us in hating this wretch. All over America stand up, if you will, in your living rooms. Face the East. Face New York City, and let anger flood your hearts. Speak it out, let it flow!"

A man beside Traub sat down, turned aside, and vomited softly into a handkerchief. Traub picked up the binoculars the man had discarded for the moment and fastened them on Ketteridge's figure, twirling the focus-knob furiously. In a moment the man leaped into the foreground. Traub saw that his eyes were full of tears, that his body was wracked with sobs, that he was in obvious pain.

"He is not fit to live," Weltmer was shouting. "Turn your anger upon him. Channel it. Make it productive. Be not angry with your family, your friends, your fellow citizens, but let your anger pour out in a violent torrent on the head of this human devil," screamed Weltmer. "Come on! Let's do it! Let's get it over with!"

At that moment Traub was at last convinced of the enormity of Ketteridge's crime, and Weltmer said, "All right, that's it. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Let's

concentrate on his right arm. Hate it, do you hear. Burn the flesh from the bone! You can do it! Come on! Burn him alive!"

Traub stared unblinking through the binoculars at Ketteridge's right arm as the prisoner leaped to his feet and ripped off his jacket, howling. With his left hand he gripped his right forearm and then Traub saw the flesh turning dark. First a deep red and then a livid purple. The fingers contracted and Ketteridge whirled on his small platform like a dervish, slapping his arm against his side.

"That's it," Weltmer called. "You're doing it. You're doing it. Mind over matter! That's it. Burn this offending flesh. Be as the avenging angels of the Lord. Smite this devil! That's it!"

The flesh was turning darker now, across the shoulders, as Ketteridge tore his shirt off. Screaming, he broke away from his chair and leaped off the platform, landing on his knees on the grass.

"Oh, the power is wonderful," cried Weltmer. "You've got him. Now let's really turn it on. Come on!"

Ketteridge writhed on the grass and then rose and began running back and forth, directionless, like a bug on a griddle.

Traub could watch no longer. He put down the binoculars and staggered back up the aisle.

Outside the stadium he walked for 12 blocks before he hailed a cab.

HOME THERE'S NO RETURNING

by

Henry Kuttner & C. L. Moore

If the last story was uncomfortably close to home, be warned that this is even closer. But don't quit now. It's the last one in the book, so you may be certain it will have a happy ending—of sorts. And, being the work of science-fantasy's foremost collaborators, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kuttner, you may be equally certain that the background of the fable will be painted in clear glowing colors; that the action of the story will move at a pulse-beat pace; and that the moral, when it comes, will be stated with an appropriate question mark.

THE GENERAL opened the door and came softly into the big, bright underground room. There by the wall under the winking control panels lay the insulated box, nine feet long, four feet wide, just as it always lay, just as he always saw it—day or night, waking or sleeping, eyes open or closed. The box shaped like a tomb. But out of it, if they were lucky, something would be born.

The General was tall and gaunt. He had stopped looking at himself in the mirror because his own face had begun to frighten him with its exhaustion, and he hated to meet the look of his own sunken eyes. He stood there feeling the beat of unseen machinery throb through the rock all around him. His nerves secretly changed each rhythmic pulse into some vast explosion, some new missile against which all defenses would be useless.

He called sharply in the empty laboratory, "Broome!"
No answer. The General walked forward and stood

above the box. Over it on the control panel lights winked softly on and off, and now and then a needle quivered. Suddenly the General folded up his fist and smashed the knuckles down hard on the reverberent metal of the box. A sound like hollow thunder boomed out of it.

"Easy, easy," somebody said. Abraham Broome was standing in the doorway, a very old man, small and wrinkled, with bright, doubtful eyes. He shuffled hastily to the box and laid a soothing hand on it, as if the box might be sentient for all he knew.

"Where the hell were you?" the General asked.

Broome said, "Resting. Letting some ideas incubate. Why?"

"You were *resting*?" The General sounded like a man who had never heard the word before. Even to himself he sounded strange. He pressed his eyelids with finger and thumb, because the room seemed to be dwindling all around him, and the face of Broome receded thinly into gray distances. But even with shut eyes he could still see the box and the sleeping steel giant inside, waiting patiently to be born. Without opening his eyes, he said, "Wake it up, Broome."

Broome's voice cracked a little. "But I haven't fin—"

"Wake it up."

"Something's gone wrong, General?"

General Conway pressed his eyelids until the darkness inside reddened—as all this darkness underground would redden when the last explosions came. Perhaps tomorrow. Not later than the day after. He was almost sure of that. He opened his eyes quickly. Broome was looking at him with a bright, dubious gaze, his lids sagging at the outer corners with the weight of unregarded years.

"I can't wait any longer," Conway said carefully. "None of us can wait. This war is too much for human beings to handle any more." He paused and let the rest of his breath go out in a sigh, not caring—perhaps not daring—to say the thing aloud that kept reverberating in his head like steadily approaching thunder. Tomorrow, or the day after—that was the deadline. The enemy was going to launch

an all-out attack on the Pacific Front Sector within the next forty-eight hours.

The computers said so. The computers had ingested every available factor from the state of the weather to the conditions of the opposing general's childhood years, and this was what they said. They could be wrong. Now and then they were wrong, when the data they received was incomplete. But you couldn't go on the assumption that they would be. You had to assume an attack would come before day after tomorrow.

General Conway had not—he thought—slept since the last attack a week ago, and that was a minor thing compared to what the computers predicted now. He was amazed in a remote, unwondering way, that the general who preceded him had lasted so long. He felt a sort of gray malice toward the man who would come after him. But there wasn't much satisfaction in that thought, either. His next in command was an incompetent fool. Conway had taken up responsibility a long time ago, and he could no more lay it down now than he would detach his painfully swimming head for a while and set it gently aside on some quiet shelf to rest. No, he would have to carry his head on his shoulders and his responsibilities on his back until—

"Either the robot can take over the job or it can't," he said. "But we can't wait any longer to find out."

He stooped suddenly and with a single powerful heave tore the box-lid open and sent it crashing back. Broome stepped up beside him and the two of them looked down on the thing that lay placidly inside, face up, passionless, its single eye unlit and as blank as Adam's before he tasted the fruit. The front panel of its chest was open upon a maze of transistors, infinitely miniature components, thin silver lines of printed circuits. A maze of fine wiring nested around the robot, but most of it was disconnected by now. The robot was almost ready to be born.

"What are we waiting for?" Conway demanded harshly. "I said wake it up!"

"Not yet, General. It isn't safe—yet. I can't predict what might happen—"

"Won't it work?"

Broome looked down at the steel mask winking with reflected lights from the panel boards above it. His face wrinkled up with hesitation. He bent to touch one finger to a wire that led into the massive opened chest at a circuit labeled "In-Put."

"It's programed," he said very doubtfully. "And yet—"

"Then it's ready," Conway's voice was flat. "You heard me, Broome. I can't wait any longer. Wake it up."

"I'm afraid to wake it up," Broome said . . .

The General's ears played a familiar trick on him. *I'm afraid—I'm afraid* . . . He couldn't make the voice stop echoing. But fear is what all flesh is heir to, he thought. Flesh knows its limitations. It was time for steel to take over.

Pushbutton warfare used to look like the easy way to fight. Now man knows better. Man knows what the weakest link is—himself. Flesh and blood. Man has the hardest job of all, the job of making decisions on incomplete data. Until now, no machine could do that. The computers were the very heartbeat and brain-pulse of pushbutton war, but they were limited thinkers. And they could shrug off responsibility with an easy, "No answer—insufficient data." After which it was up to man to give them what more they needed. The right information, the right questions, the right commands. No wonder the turnover in generals was so high.

So the Electronic Guidance Operator was conceived. The General looked down at it, lying quietly waiting for birth. Ego was its name. And it would have free will, after a fashion. The real complexity of the fabulous computers lies not in the machines themselves, but in the programing fed into them. The memory banks are no good at all without instructions about how to use the data. And instructions are extremely complex to work out.

That was going to be Ego's job from now on. Ego had been designed to act like the human brain, on only partial knowledge, as no machine before had ever done. Flesh and

blood had reached their limits, Conway thought. Now was the hour for steel to take over. So Ego lay ready to taste the first bite of the apple. Adam bit. Tireless like steel, resourceful like flesh, munching the apple mankind was so tired of munching. . . .

"What do you mean, afraid?" Conway asked.

"It's got free will," Broome said. "Don't you see? I can't set up free will *and* controls. I can only give it one basic order—*win the war*. But I can't tell it how. I don't know how. I can't even tell it what not to do. Ego will simply wake like—well, like a man educated and matured in his sleep, waking for the first time. It will feel needs, and act on its wants. I can't control it. And that scares me, General."

Conway stood still, blinking, feeling exhaustion vibrate shrilly in his nerve ends. He sighed and touched the switch on his lapel microphone. "Conway here. Send Colonel Garden to Operation Christmas. And a couple of MPs."

Broome burst into very rapid speech. "No, General! Give me another week. Give me just a few days—"

"You've got about two minutes," Conway said. He thought, See how you like quick decisions. And this is only one. I've had five years of it. How long since I slept last? Well, never mind, never mind that. Make Broome decide. Push him. *Resting!*

Broome said, "I won't do it. No. I can't take the responsibility. I need more time to test—"

"You'll go on testing till doomsday. You'll never activate it," Conway said.

The door opened. The two MPs followed Colonel Garden into the room. Garden's uniform looked sloppy, as usual. The man wasn't built for a uniform. But the dark pouches under his eyes tempered Conway's contempt. Garden hadn't slept much lately, either. It was past time for all of them now—Ego must pick up the burden and justify its name.

"Arrest Broome," Conway said. He ignored their startled looks. "Colonel, can you wake up this robot?"

"Wake it up, sir?"

Conway gestured impatiently. "Activate it, start it going."

"Well, yes, sir, I do know how, but—"

Conway didn't bother to listen. He pointed to the robot, and whatever else Garden was saying became a meaningless yammer in his ears. Forty-eight hours, he thought—time enough to test it before the attack comes, if we're lucky. And it had better work. He pressed thumb and finger to his eyes again to keep the room from swinging in slow, balancing circles around him.

Broome from the far end of nowhere said, "Wait, General! Give me just one day more! It isn't—"

Conway waved his hand, not opening his eyes. He heard one of the MPs say something, and there was a brief scuffle. Then the door closed. The General sighed and opened his eyes.

Garden was looking at him with the same doubt Broome had shown. Conway scowled and the other man turned quickly to the box where the robot lay. He stooped as Broome had done and touched with one finger the wire cord still leading into the spot marked "In-Put."

"Once this is detached, sir, he's on his own," he said.

"The thing has its orders," the General said briefly. "Go on, do something."

There was a little pinging noise as Garden neatly detached the cord. He closed the steel plate that sealed Eco's inwards. He ran his hands around the steel limbs to make sure all the nest of wires was clear. Then he got up and crossed to the instrument panel.

"Sir," he said.

Conway didn't answer for a moment. He was rocking just perceptibly to and fro, heel and toe, like a tower beginning to totter. He said, "Don't tell me anything I don't want to hear."

Garden said composedly, "I don't know just what to expect, sir. Will you tell me as soon as the robot starts to respond? Even the slightest—"

"I'll tell you." Conway looked down at the placid blind

face. Wake up, he thought. Or else don't. It doesn't really matter. Because we can't go on like this. Wake up. Then I can sleep. Or don't wake up. Then I can die.

The round, flat cyclopean lens of the robot's eye began to glow softly. In the same moment a rising hum of power from the instrument panel made the lights dim, and all the reflections shimmering from Ego's steel surfaces paled and then burned strong again as auxiliary switches kicked in. One by one the lights on the panel went out. The quivering needles rocked to and fro at zero and quieted.

The robot stared blankly up at the ceiling, not moving.

Conway, looking down, thought, Now it's your turn. I've gone as far as a man can go. Take over, robot. Move!

The robot's whole body shivered very, very slightly. The eye brightened until it sent a cone of light straight up at the ceiling. Without the slightest warning it lifted both arms at once out of the box and smashed its metal hands together with a clang that made both men jump. Conway gasped with surprise and released tension. Uselessly he said, "Garden!"

Garden opened a switch and the singing whine of power died. The robot was motionless again, but this time, like an effigy on a tomb, it lay with palms pressed together hard. The shivering began again and rhythmic clicking sounds like many clocks ticking out of phase could be heard faintly from deep inside the big steel cylinder of the body.

"What's happening?" Conway asked, whispering without knowing why. "What made it do that?"

"Activation," Garden said, also whispering. "It—" He paused, cleared his throat self-consciously, and spoke aloud. "I'm not too familiar with this, sir. I suppose the basic tensions are setting up. They'll be relieved through energy transformation of some kind or other, depending on the homeostatic principle that Broome—"

From the box and the supine robot a strange, hollow voice spoke in a kind of howl. "Want. . ." it said painfully, and then seemed to stop itself short. "Want. . ." it said again, and ceased abruptly.

"What is it?" Conway wasn't sure whether he was addressing Ego or Garden. The sound of the voice frightened him. It was so mindless, like a ghost's, flat and hollow.

"There's a speaker in its chest," Garden said, his own voice a little shaken. "I'd forgotten. But it ought to communicate better than this. It—he—Ego—" Garden gestured helplessly. "Some kind of block, I should think." He stepped forward and bent over the box, looking down. "You—want something?" he asked awkwardly, sounding foolish. Conway thought what an ineffectual man he was. But at least the robot was awake now. Surely in a little while it would be adjusted, ready to take over. .

Well, maybe they could all relax a little, after that. Maybe Conway could even sleep. A sudden panic shook him briefly as he thought, What if I've forgotten how to sleep? And exhaustion rolled up over him like water washing over a man of sand, relaxing and crumbling away the very components of his limbs. In just a moment I'll be free, Conway thought. When Ego takes over. I've made it. I haven't gone mad or killed myself. And now I won't have to think any more. I'll just stand here, without moving. I won't even lie down. If gravity wants to pull me down, that's up to gravity. . . .

Garden, bending over the box, said again, "What is it you want?"

"*Want. . .*" Ego said. And suddenly the prayerful hands flashed apart, the four-foot arms flung wide like shining flails. Then it lay motionless again, but Colonel Garden was no longer leaning over the box. Conway saw, with hazy detachment, that Garden was crumpling down against the wall. The flail had caught him across the side of the neck, and he lay with his head at an angle like a jointed doll, more motionless now than the robot.

Moving slowly, Conway touched the switch of his lapel microphone. The silence hummed receptively. There was a long interval while he couldn't quite remember his name. But presently he spoke.

"General Conway here. Bring Broome back to Operation Christmas."

He looked down at the robot. "Wait a while," he said. "Broome will know."

The robot's arms bent. The steel hands closed upon the sides of the box, and with a shriek of metal parting from metal it ripped the box apart.

Now it was born. Born? Untimely ripped, Conway thought. Untimely ripped. I suppose I was wrong. What next?

Ego rose upright, eight feet tall, solid as a tower, and like a walking tower it moved. It moved straight forward until the wall stopped it. Slowly it turned, its cone of vision sweeping the room, its motions at first jerky and uneven, but becoming smoother and surer with the warming-up process of the newly activated machine. It was still trembling just perceptibly, and the ticking rose and fell inside it, drew out in slow series, quickened, burst into rapid chatter, slowed again. Sorting, accepting, rejecting, evaluating the new-found world which was now the robot's burden. . .

It saw the wall of control panels which had activated it. The beam of its sight swept the panels briefly, and then with a burst of surprising speed it rushed across the room toward the panels. Its hands danced over the plugboard, the switches, the dials.

Nothing happened. The panels were dead.

"Want. . ." said the hollow, inhuman cry from Ego's reverberating chest. And with two sweeps of the steel hands it sheared cleanly off the board all the projecting globes and dials and switches. It sank steel fingers into the sockets and ripped the plating off. It wound both hands deep into the colored wiring inside and ripped great handfuls out in a sort of measured frenzy.

"Ego!" Conway said.

It heard him. It turned, very fast. The bright gaze bathed him for a moment. He felt cold as it held him in its focus, as if a mind the temperature of steel were locked with his. He could almost feel the touch of the newfledged, infinitely resourceful brain.

The light of its gaze passed him and saw the door. It

dismissed Conway. It surged forward like a tank and hit the door flatly with its chest, cracking the panels in two. With a single motion it swept the wreckage away on both sides and rolled forward through the splintered frame.

By the time Conway reached the door the robot was a long way off down the underground corridor, moving faster and faster, dwindling toward the vanishing point like a shrinking drop of quicksilver. Going—somewhere.

"General Conway, sir," somebody said.

He turned. The two MPs flanked Abraham Broome who was craning forward trying to see the wrecked instrument panel from between them.

"Dismissed," Conway said. "Come in, Broome."

The old man went past him obliviously, stooped over Garden's body, shook his head.

"I was afraid of something like this," he said.

Conway felt a moment of intense envy for the motionless Garden. He said, "Yes. I'm sorry. One casualty. We'll all be casualties if Ego doesn't work. How do we know what the other side's doing now? Maybe they've got an Ego too. I made a mistake, Broome. I should have looked ahead a little further. What do we do now?"

"What happened?" Broome was looking incredulously at the shattered wall where the instrument panels had been. "Where's the robot now? I've got to know the details."

A communicator high on the wall coughed and then called Conway's name. Slowly and heavily Conway's mind tried to accept the new demands. But what the communicator said was a jumble of meaningless sounds until one word sprang out at him. *Emergency*.

Attack? An alarm rang shrilly deep in his head. "Repeat," he said wearily.

"General Conway? A robot is destroying equipment in Sector Sub-Five. Attempts to immobilize it are failing. General Conway? A robot is destroying—"

"All right," Conway said. At least, this wasn't an attack, then. Or anyway, not an attack from the enemy. "Conway here. Orders. Don't harm the robot. Instructions follow.

Stand by."

He looked at Broome inquiringly, realizing that the old man had been buzzing at him anxiously in meaningless words. "General, General, I've got to know exactly what happened—"

"Shut up and I'll tell you," Conway said. "Wait."

He walked over to a hand basin at the wall, drew a glass of chemical-tasting water and found the tube of benzedrine pills in his pocket. It wouldn't help much. He had been living on the stuff too long. But this ought to be the last push—had to be the last—and every extra ounce of stimulus helped. He could let go soon, but not yet.

He gave Broome a concise, thirty-second summary in a falsely brisk voice. The old man stood silent, pinching his lip and gazing at Conway with a blank face, his mind obviously ranging around the abstract regions inside his head.

"Well?" Conway asked. "What do you think? Is it running wild or isn't it?" He wanted to reach out and shake Broome awake, but he pushed the impulse down. Once already he had forced the issue over Broome's protest, and he had been wrong. Perhaps fatally wrong. Now he must let the old man think.

"I believe it's on the job," Broome said with maddening deliberation. "I was afraid of something like this—uncontrolled reaction. But the program's built into it and I think it's operating toward the goal we set it. One thing's wrong, of course. It ought to communicate better. There shouldn't be that speech block. We'll have to find out what it wants and why it can't tell us." He paused and blinked up at the com-box on the wall. "Sub-Five, didn't they say? What's in Sub-Five?"

"The library," Conway said, and they looked at each other in silence for a second. Then Conway sighed another of his deep, collapsing sighs and said, "Well, we've got to stop it, somehow, and fast. Ego's the most important thing we've got, but if it tears the whole base up—"

"Not quite the most important," Broome said. "Have you thought what it may do next? Since the library was its

first goal?"

"What? Don't make me guess."

"It seems to be hunting information. The next stop after the library might be the computers, don't you think?"

Conway said, "Good God," in a flat, exhausted tone. Then he laughed a little without making a sound. He would have to jump into action in the next few moments, and he wasn't sure he could do it. He'd been a fool, of course, pushing action on the robot too soon. Without precautions. He'd gambled, and maybe he had lost. But he knew he'd still do the same if he had it to do over. The gamble wasn't lost yet. And what alternative had he?

"Yes," he said. "The computers. You're right. If it goes after them we'll have to smash it."

"If we can," Broome said soberly. "It thinks fast."

Wearily Conway straightened his shoulders, wondering whether the benzedrine was going to take hold this time. He didn't feel it yet, but he couldn't wait.

"All right," he said. "Let's get going. We know our jobs. Mine's to immobilize Eco, unless he goes for the computers. Yours—find out what he wants. Get it from him before he smashes himself and us. Come on. We've wasted enough time." He gripped Broome's thin arm and hurried him toward the door. On the way he touched his lapel switch and said into the receptive hum at his shoulder, "Conway here. I'm on my way in. Where's the robot?"

The thin little voice of the mike started to say, "Just leaving Sub-Five, sir—through the wall. We—" But then the com-box in the laboratory behind them coughed loudly and shouted out in a metallic bellow, "Robot broke through the wall into Sub-Seventeen!" There was a tinny astonishment in its voice. "Destroying equipment in storage files—" All of this was funneled through the Communications Room, and the echoes of the complaint from Sub-Seventeen could be heard mingling confusedly through the lapel mike. Conway clicked it on and off several times.

"Com Room!" he said into the noisy turmoil. "Find out which way the robot's heading."

There was a brief pause, during which the com box behind them roared out its diminishing report of damage. Then, "It's heading inward, sir," the mike said thinly. "Toward Sub-Thirty."

Conway glanced down at Broome, who nodded and shaped a silent word with his lips. "Computers." Conway set his jaw.

"Start sending up heavy-duty robots to head it off," he told the mike crisply. "Immobilize the robot if you can but don't damage him without my orders." He laid his hand over the lapel mike to deafen it, hearing a small, distant uproar filtering out from under his palm as he urged Broome to a trot down the long corridor where the robot had dwindled to a shining dot such a short time ago. But he was hearing his own last words repeating over and over in undiminishing echoes inside his head, "My orders—my orders—my orders—"

He thought he could go on giving orders—up to a point. Just long enough to get Ego under control. No longer.

"Broome," he said abruptly, "*can* the robot take over?" And he held his breath waiting for the answer, wondering what he would do if it was no.

"I never doubted it," Broome said. Conway let his breath out with a feeling of luxury in the sigh. But Broome went on, "If we can find out why he went wrong, of course. I have an idea, but I don't see how I can test it—"

"What?"

"Maybe an iteration loop. A closed series of steps that repeat themselves over and over. But I don't know what's involved. He says 'want' and then blocks completely. I don't know why. Some compulsion is driving him so powerfully he doesn't even bother to open doors to get at what it is he wants. I don't know what. My job's to find out."

Conway thought to himself, "Maybe I know what." But he didn't explore the thought. It was too chilly in the mind, and yet so simple he wondered why Broome hadn't thought of it. Or maybe he had. . . .

Ego's goal was winning the war. But suppose it was not

possible to win the war? . . .

Conway shook his head sharply and put that idea firmly away.

"Okay, you know your job," he said. "Now about mine—how can we stop him without harming him?" With a small fraction of his mind he noticed that he was personalizing the robot now. Ego had begun to assume an identity.

Broome shook his head unhappily as he trotted beside Conway. "That's one reason I was afraid to activate him." Broome was doing it too. "He's complex, General. I've got him pretty well cushioned against normal jolts, but an artificial brain isn't like a human brain. One little injury means malfunction. And besides, he's so fast I'm not sure what would stop him even if we didn't have to worry about damage."

"There's a limit to what I can bring up in time, anyhow," Conway said. "What about ultrasonics? We could cripple him, maybe—"

"Let me think about it. Ultrasonics that close might scramble something." Broome was panting heavily from their rapid pace.

Conway uncovered the mike. "Com Room? Get a supersonic squad in the computer room corridor fast. But wait orders. If the robot shows up don't open fire until—"

He broke off abruptly, having overshot the usefulness of the mike without realizing it. He was at the Com Room door and his own voice was crackling at him out of a box hanging low in the greenish gloom over the communications officer's chair about ten feet away.

He let the door swing shut behind him and was engulfed in noise and darkness. The big glass information panels and the colored circles of the com screens glowed bright and the faces of the men swam dimly in the gloom, highlights picked out on their cheekbones and foreheads in gold and red, green and faint blue reflected from the instruments they tended. General Conway automatically flashed a tired glance around the boards and screens that told him what was happening on the entire Pacific Front. He saw the radar shadows of the fleet, checked the code

board for wind and weather, the status panel for plane assignments. But the information meant nothing. His brain refused to accept the burden. He had only one problem now.

"Where's the robot?" he asked. He had to shout to make himself heard, because to the normal noise of the room with its complex of relayed voices was now added a crashing uproar Conway failed to identify for a moment.

The communications officer nodded toward a bluish television screen at his left, part of a long row. Small and bright upon it a doll-sized robot could be seen, raging through a doll-sized storeroom. But the noise it made was life-size. It seemed to be hunting for something, and its method was frantic. It didn't open drawers—it ripped the whole side off cabinets and swept the contents out with great, rhythmic, scything motions, sending them spinning through the air. Now and then the bright cone of its glance would swerve to follow the fall of some object briefly, and twice the robot paused to snatch up items and turn them tentatively over. But clearly, whatever it wanted was not here. And as clearly, it operated on true egoism—whatever it found useless it destroyed furiously. It had no referent but its own immediate need.

"And maybe he's right," Conway thought. "Maybe if we can't get him whatever he needs nothing down here is worth keeping."

Behind him he heard Broome and the communications officer conferring in strained voices above the tumult.

"I don't know," the officer was shouting. "It tore up the library so fast we couldn't tell what it had read and what it hadn't. You see how it's going now. It moves so fast—"

Broome leaned over the communications officer's shoulder and punched the two-way button on the intercom for Sub-Seventeen where the robot was raging.

"Ego," he said into the mike. "Do you hear me?"

The robot ripped down the side of the last cabinet, swept its contents out in a rhythmic shower. Amplified over the screen they heard Broome's voice echo back to them from the tiny greenish storeroom on the wall. The

robot paused very briefly. Then it stood up straight, turned around once in a very rapid circuit that swept its cone of light across the walls.

"Want—" its hollow voice howled, and instantly shut itself off into silence again. It crashed its hands together like something in the last extremity of desperation, and then walked straight for the wall at the corner of the room.

The wall bent, cracked and opened. The robot stalked through and out of sight.

It seemed to Conway that every face in the room swung around toward his, pale ovals glistening with drops of gold and red and greenish sweat in the darkness. It was up to him now. They waited for instructions.

He wanted to lash out as the robot had lashed, tear these floating luminous screens down and smash the glowing panels with them, silence the yammering voices from the walls. Responsibilities he could not handle buzzed like hot bees around his head. It was too much, too much. A deep wave of exhaustion washed over him, followed by a wave of hysteric exhilaration, both so ghostly and so far away they hardly seemed to touch Conway at all. He was somebody else entirely, infinite distances off, with ghostly problems that had no relation to the vacuum of the here and now. . . .

"General?" Broome's voice said. "General?"

Conway coughed. "The robot," he said briskly. "We've got to stop him. You plotting his course so far, Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir. Screen Twelve."

Twelve was one of the hanging panels, transparent in the dark, a net of luminous gold lines on it marking the corridors, with the sectors showing in dim blue numerals. "The red dots are the robot, sir," the sergeant told him.

They watched a disembodied hand float forward from behind the screen and add fluorescent grease-dots to the lengthening red line which had started in Broome's lab, crossed the library and storeroom and gone out by the solid wall. They stalked now across the next three sectors, wading through the walls as they went in an elongating luminous chain of red.

Their goal was obvious to everyone. About seven inches ahead in the heart of the map lay a round room with bright green squares glowing around its walls. They all knew what the green squares were. They all knew how intimately their own survival hinged upon the blizzard of electronic impulses storming through those incredibly complex calculations in the computers. Every mind in the room clicked over like the computers themselves, considering what would happen when the robot reached that room.

"The supersonic team," Conway said crisply. "The heavy-duty robots. Where are they?"

"The supersonics are coming up from level six, sir. About five minutes for them. The HD robots should intersect in about three minutes. You can see them in—what is it? purple?—on the plot panel."

A slow line of purple dots was moving inward down a gold-lined corridor from the periphery of the chart.

"Too slow," Conway said, watching the red dots which marked the footsteps of the thinking robot. Or was it thinking, now? "Anybody know if those walls between are plaster or stone?" There was a silence. Nobody did. But as they watched, the red dots paused at a gold line, rebounded twice, reversed themselves and made for a break in the line that indicated a door.

"Stone," Conway said. "That one, anyhow. I hope he didn't jar anything loose trying."

"Maybe we'd better hope he did," Broome said.

Conway looked at the old man. "I'm going to stop him," he said. "Understand? We're not going to junk Ego. We need him too badly. I'm sorry we weren't better prepared to handle him, but I'd do it again if I had to. We can't wait."

"He's moving fast, sir," the communications officer said.

Conway looked at the screen. He bit his lip painfully and then said, "Volunteers. I want somebody to jump in there and delay him. I don't care how. Trip him. Wave a red rag in his face. Anything to gain time. Every second counts. All right, Corporal. Lieutenant, that's two."

"We can't spare any more from here," the communica-

tions officer said.

"All right, on your way," Conway snapped. "Get him on the screens, sergeant."

Three round television screens clicked into bluish life, showing a trail of wrecked desks and smashed equipment. In the third screen Ego, looking very small and remote and innocent, was smashing himself head-on against a too-narrow door. On the last smash the door-frame gave way and Ego surged through and stalked off down the tiny, diminishing corridor beyond. On the plot board the red dots showed him only about five inches away from the calculator room.

"But what do you *want* with the calculators?" Broome was murmuring as he stared after the vanishing figure on the screen. He tapped irritably with his nails on the metal table. "Maybe," he said, and paused. He looked up at Conway. "I'm no good here, General. I'm going to the calculator room. I have some ideas, but the analogue computer thinks a lot faster than I do. Ego moves too fast. It may take machines to figure out machines. Anyhow, I'll try."

"Go on, go on then," Conway said. "You've got between five and ten minutes. After that—" He didn't finish, but in his mind he said, "—I can rest. One way or the other, I can rest."

The communications officer had been clicking television screens on and off, hunting. Now he said, "Look, sir! The volunteer team—God, he's tall!" The observation was spontaneous; until now the communications room hadn't seen Ego alongside human figures.

Ego was a stalking giant in a dimly lit corridor on the screen. The volunteers had just burst out of a corridor door ten paces ahead of him, and he towered mightily over them. You could see their tiny, scared faces no bigger than peas turned up toward the oblivious, striding giant as he followed the searchlight splash of his single eye down the hall.

The two men must have moved at a dead run from here to there. They hadn't had time to pick and choose, and

their instructions had been ambiguous, but somewhere on the way they had snatched up a stout steel beam which now showed like a bright thread across the corridor. One man darted across the hall just ahead of the robot, and the two of them braced the beam shoulder high from opposite doorways, making a barrier across the path.

The robot didn't even glance at the obstacle. He struck the beam squarely, the clang echoing through the corridor and reverberating from the screen into the communications room. Ego bounced a little, recovered his balance, measured the situation and then stooped to pass under the bar. Hastily the two men lowered their burden. Again a clang and a recoil, and this time the bar bent into a deep V at the point of impact. Over the screen they heard one of the men yell as the end of the bar caught him. Ego heaved upward with both hands, stepped under the bar and stalked off down the hall.

"Thirty seconds saved," Conway said bitterly. "And one man down. Where are the HDs now?"

"About a minute and a half away, sir. Coming along corridor eight. They ought to intersect just outside the calculator room door. See, on the board?"

Slowly and heavily, it seemed to Conway, the purple dots moved against the darkness, ploddingly. A floating hand materialized and added two more red dots to the chain of Ego's footsteps moving toward the heart of the citadel. The red dots were ahead. They were going to outstrip the purple.

"I'm going to fail," Conway said to himself. He thought of all the human lives here underground, wholly dependent upon him, and all the lives outside, confident that the Pacific Front was in good hands. He wondered what the commanding general on the other side was doing now, and what he would do if he knew. . . .

"Look, sir," the communications officer said.

There was still one man of the volunteer team left on his feet. He hadn't given up yet. Ego's last heave had apparently snapped the steel bar off short at the V, leaving one end like a bent club. It must have been very heavy,

but the man in the corridor was operating on a drive too intense to notice the weight. Club on shoulder, he was sprinting after Ego down the hall.

They saw him lessen the distance between them. They saw him at the robot's heels. Distantly they heard him shout.

"Ego!" he called, as he had heard Broome call the name. And in answer, as the robot had answered before, Ego paused, turned, bathed the man in the cold one-eyed beam of its searchlight.

"*Want—*" the strangled, metallic voice said hollowly, and stopped.

The man with the club jumped high and smashed for the single bright eye in the robot's forehead.

"Is it safe?" Conway asked. "Will he hurt him, Broome?" But he got no answer. Broome had disappeared.

On the screen the robot struck upward furiously with both hands, parrying the club just in time. The crash of impact made the screen shiver. The man had time and strength for one more swing, and this time at the height of its arc Ego seized the club and plucked it almost casually out of the man's hands. Over his enormous steel shoulder he sent it clanging down the corridor behind him.

Conway glanced quickly at the chart. The purple dots were gaining. The red dot at the end of Ego's chain wavered left and right as Ego dodged the two blows of the club. Conway looked back at the screen.

The disarmed man hesitated only briefly. Then he gathered himself and sprang straight up toward the blank steel face with its single eye. By some miracle he passed between the closing arms and locked his own arms around the steel neck. His body blinded the torch-lens of the robot's eye, and he clung desperately, legs and arms clenched around the lurching steel tower of Ego's body.

From the darkness beyond their struggling figures a heavy, rhythmic thudding began to be heard, making the television screen vibrate a little.

"The heavy-duties," Conway breathed. He glanced again at the chart, not needing it to see the line of purple

dots almost at the corridor intersection now, and the red dot of Ego wavering erratically.

The robot didn't depend on vision alone. You could tell that by his motion. But the clinging man disturbed him. The heaving weight pulled him off balance. Ego plucked futilely at the man for an instant, staggering thirty degrees off course toward the left-hand wall. Then the steel hands got a grip on the clinging man, and the robot ripped him away easily and smoothly, with a gesture like tearing a shirt off his chest, and flung him with casual force against the wall.

Beyond Ego, at the far end of the corridor, you could see the tall double doors of the calculator room. Ego stood for a moment as if he were collecting himself. The screen seemed to be wavering, and Conway made a futile, steady-motion toward it. The vibration was so strong now that vision blurred upon it.

"What's the matter?" Conway asked irritably. "Is it out of focus, or—"

"Look, sir," the communications officer said. "Here they come."

Like a walking wall the heavy robots wheeled out of the darkness at the edge of the screen, their ponderous tread making the whole scene shudder. Heavily they ground to a halt facing Ego, and stood there shoulder to shoulder across the corridor, their backs to the calculator doors.

Ego stood for a moment quite still, but shivering all over, his single eye sweeping from left to right and back again over them, infinitely fast. Something about these units of his own kind seemed to kindle a new and compelling drive, and Ego gathered himself together and lowered his shoulders and head a little, and surged forward as if eager for battle. The HDs, locked together in an unswerving row, braced themselves and stood firm.

The crash made every screen in the communications room flicker in distant sympathy. Sparks sprang out and steel plates groaned. Ego hung for an instant motionless upon the steel wall that opposed him, then fell back, stag-

gered, braced himself to crash again.

But he did not charge. He stood there sweeping his bright scanner over the line, and the clicking in his chest rose and fell so loudly the listeners in the communications room could hear it plainly. A storm of alternate choices seemed to be pouring through the electronic mind of the thinker.

While Ego hesitated, the steel wall he confronted moved, curving outward at both ends toward the solitary figure. It was clear what the intention of the operators was. If these ponderous shapes could be made to close Ego in they could immobilize him by sheer massiveness, like tame elephants immobilizing a wild one.

But Ego saw the trap in the instant *before* the line began to move. His backward step and quick spin showed it. Conway thought his eye flashed brighter, and his whirl was incongruously light-footed. In contrast to the heavy-duty machines he looked like a steel dancer in his light, keen balance. He made a quick feint toward one end of the line, and the robots massed sluggishly together to receive him. They opened a gap in their line when they moved, and Ego darted for the gap. But instead of passing through it he put out both arms and pushed delicately and fiercely at the two sides of the opening, in exactly the right spots. The two robots leaned ponderously outward, tipped just barely off their balance. They leaned, leaned, inexorably leaned and fell. Each carried its next companion down with it. The corridor thundered with the crash.

Trampling on the fallen machines, the line closed up and moved ponderously forward. Ego ran at it with a clear illusion of joyous motion, stooped, struck two robots at once with the same delicate, exact precision, knowing before he struck at just what hidden fulcrum point their balance rested. The corridor thundered again with the tumult of their collapse. As the line tried to close once more over the fallen warriors Ego's hands shot out and helped them heavily together, smashing two more into one another with unexpected momentum. This time as he touched them his touches were sharp blows, and the steel

plating buckled in like tin.

In less than two minutes the walking wall was a mass of staggering leviathans, half of them out of commission, the rest stumbling ponderously over their fallen comrades trying to reform a line already too short to work.

So much for that try, Conway thought. Then the super-sonics were their last hope. There wouldn't be time for more. Maybe there wasn't even time for that.

"Where's the supersonic squad?" he asked, impressed at the false briskness of his own voice. The communications officer looked up at the luminous chart.

"Almost there, General. Half a minute away."

Conway glanced once at the television screen, which now showed Ego standing over the prostrate metal giants and swaying rather oddly as he looked down. It wasn't like his behavior pattern to hesitate like this. There seemed to be something on his mind. Whatever it was, it might mean a few moments' leeway.

"I'm going out there myself, sergeant," Conway said. "I—I want to be on the spot when—" He paused, realizing that he was saying aloud what was really a private soliloquy, Conway to Conway, with no eavesdroppers. What he meant was that he wanted to be there when the end came—one way or the other. He had envied the robot, he had hoped infinite things for it. He had begun to identify with the powerful and tireless steel. Win or lose, he wanted to be on the spot at the payoff.

Running down the corridor was like running in a dream, floating, almost, his legs numb and the sound of his footfalls echoing from feathery distances. Each time his weight jolted down he wondered if that knee could take it, whether it wouldn't fold and let him fall, let him lie there and rest. . . . But no, he wanted to stand beside Ego and see the steel face and hear the mindless voice when they destroyed the robot, or the robot destroyed them all. The third chance—success—seemed too remote to consider.

When he got there he hardly knew it. He was dimly aware that he had stopped running, so there must be a reason. He was standing with his hand on a doorknob, his

back leaning against the panels, gasping for breath. To the left stretched the narrow corridor down which he had run. Before him the broad hall loomed where men had fought Ego and failed, and machines had fought him and now lay almost still, or staggered futilely, out of control.

No matter how clearly you see a scene on television screens, you never really experience it until you get there. Conway had forgotten, in this brief while, how tall Ego really was. There was a smell of machine oil and hot metal in the air, and dust motes danced in the cone of Ego's searchlight as he stooped over the fallen robots. He was about to do something. Conway couldn't guess what.

Running footsteps and the clank of equipment sounded down the corridor to the left. Conway turned his head a little and saw the supersonic squad pounding toward him. He thought, maybe there's still a chance. If Ego delays another two minutes. . . .

On the floor the fallen robots still twitched and stirred in response to the distant commands of their operators. But a heavy-duty robot, fallen, isn't easy to set upright again. Ego stooped over the nearest, seeming almost puzzled.

Then with sudden, rather horrifying violence, he reached out and ripped the front plate off his victim with one rending motion. His gaze plunged shining into the entrails of the thing, glancing in bright reflections off the tubes and the wiring so coarse in comparison with his own transistors and printed circuits. He put out one steel hand, sank his fingers deep and ripped again, gazing, engrossed, at the havoc he made. There was something frightful about this act of murder, one robot deliberately disemboweling another on his own initiative, with what seemed the coolest scientific interest.

But whatever Ego sought wasn't there. He straightened and went on to the next, ripped, stooped, studied the ticking and flashing entrails intently, his own inward ticking quite loud as if he were muttering to himself.

Conway, beckoning the supersonic squad on, thought

to himself, "In the old days they used to tell fortunes that way. Maybe he's doing it now. . . ." And once more the chilly thought swam up to the surface of his consciousness that perhaps he knew what drove the robot to desperation. Perhaps he too knew the future, and the knowledge and the pressure made the two of them kin. *Win the war* was what Ego's ticking entrails commanded, just as the more complex neurons of Conway's brain commanded him. But what if winning was impossible, and Ego knew. . . .

The supersonic squad, running hard, burst out of the side corridor and pulled up short at their first sight of Ego in the—no, not flesh. In the shining steel, giant-tall, with the cyclops eye glaring. The sergeant panted something at Conway, trying to salute, forgetting that both his hands were full of equipment.

Conway with his pointing finger drew a semicircle in front of him before the calculator room door.

"Set the guns up, quick—along here. We've got to stop him if he tries to get in."

Ego straightened from his second victim and moved on to a third, hesitating over it, looking down.

The squad had, after all, only about thirty seconds to spare. They had been assembling their equipment as they ran, and now with speed as precise as machinery they took up positions along the line Conway had assigned them. He stood against the door, looking down at their stooping backs as they drew up the last line of defense with their own bodies and their guns between Ego and the calculators. Or no, Conway thought, maybe I'm the last line. For some remote and despairing thought was shaping itself in his mind as he looked at Ego. . . .

In exactly the same second that the first ultrasonic gun swung its snout toward the corridor, Ego straightened and faced the double doors and the circle of men kneeling behind their guns. It seemed to Conway that over their heads he and Ego looked at each other challengingly for a moment.

"Sergeant," Conway said in a tense voice. "Cut him off at the leg, halfway to the knee. And pinpoint it *fine*. He's

full of precision stuff and he's worth a lot more than you or me."

Ego bathed them in his cold headlight beam. Conway, wondering if the robot had understood, said quickly, "Fire."

You could hear the faintest possible hissing, nothing more. But a spot of heat glowed cherry-red and then blinding white upon Ego's left leg just below the knee.

Conway thought, "It's hopeless. If he charges us now he'll break through before we can—"

But Ego had another defense. The searchlight glance blinked once, and then Conway felt a sudden, violent discomfort he couldn't place, and the heat-spot went red again and faded. The sergeant dropped the gun nozzle and swore, shaking his hand.

"Fire on six," he said. "Eight, stand by."

Ego stood motionless, and the discomfort Conway felt deepened in rhythm with a subtle, visible vibration that pulsed through the steel tower before him.

A second sonic gun hissed faintly. A spot of red sprang out on the robot's leg. The vibration deepened, the discomfort grew worse. The heat-spot faded to nothing.

"Interference, sir," the sergeant said. "He's blanketing the sound-wave with a frequency of his own—something he's giving out himself. Feel it?"

"But why doesn't he charge?" Conway asked himself, not aloud, for fear the robot could really understand. And he thought, maybe he can't charge and broadcast the protecting frequency at the same time. Or maybe he hasn't thought yet that he could wade right through before we could hurt him much. And Conway tried to picture to himself the world as it must look to Ego, less than an hour old, with impossible conflicts raging in the electronic complexities of his chest.

Conway said, "The eight-gun's on another frequency? Keep trying, sergeant. Maybe he can't blanket them all at once. Hold out as long as you can."

He opened the door behind him quickly and softly and went into the computer room.

This was another world. For a moment he forgot everything that lay outside the double doors and stood there taking in the feel and smell and sight of the room. It was a good place. He had always liked to be here. He could forget what stood eight feet tall and poised for destruction outside the door, and what lay waiting in the future, no farther away than day after tomorrow. He looked up at the high, flat faces of the computers, liking the way the lights winked, the sound of tape feeding through drums, the steady, pouring sound of typewriter keys, the orderly, dedicated feel of the place.

Broome looked up from the group around the typewriter of the analogue computer. All the men in the room had left their jobs and were clustering here, where the broad tape flowed out from under the keys and the columns of print poured smoothly, like water, onto the paper.

"Anything?" Conway asked.

Broome straightened painfully, easing his back.

"I'm not sure."

"Tell me," Conway said. "Quick. He'll be here in seconds."

"He's set up a block, accidentally. That's pretty sure. But how and why we still don't—"

"Then you don't know anything," Conway said flatly.

"Well, I think I may have a—"

On the other side of the door sudden tumult broke out. Steel feet thudded, men shouted, equipment crackled and spat. The shouting rose to a crescendo and fell silent. The double doors crashed open and Ego stood on the threshold, facing the calculators. Here and there on his steel body spots of dull heat were fading. He was smeared with stains of oil and blood, and his searchlight eye swept around the room with a controlled speed that yet had something frantic in it. Ego looked at the calculators and the calculators placidly ticked on, rolling out unheeded data under the jaws of their typewriters as every man in the room faced the robot.

In the open doorway behind Ego the squad sergeant stumbled into sight, blood across his face, the nozzle of a

sonic-gun in his hand.

"No," Conway said. "Wait. Stand aside, Broome. Let Ego get to the calculators."

He paid no attention to the buzz of shocked response. He was looking at Ego with almost hypnotized attention, trying to force the cogs of his own thinking to mesh faster. There was still a chance. Just a shadow of a chance, he knew that. And if he let Ego at the calculators and Ego failed, he wasn't sure he could interfere in time to save anything. But he had to try. A line of dialogue out of something he couldn't identify floated through his mind. *Yet I will try the last.* Some other desperate commander in his last battle, indomitable in the face of defeat. Conway grinned a little, knowing himself anything but indomitable. And yet—*I will try the last.*

Ego still stood motionless in the doorway. Time moves so much slower than thought. The robot still scanned the computers and thought with complex tickings to himself. Conway stepped aside, leaving the way clear. As he moved he saw his own image swim up at him from the stained surfaces of the robot body, his own gaunt face and hollow eyes reflected as if from a moving mirror smeared with oil and blood, as if it were he himself who lived inside the robot's body, activating it with his own drives.

Ego's pause on the threshold lasted only a fraction of a second. His glance flicked the calculators and dismissed them one by one, infinitely fast. Then, as Broome had done, Ego wheeled to the analogue computer and crossed the floor in three enormous strides. Almost contemptuously, without even scanning it, he ripped out the programming tape. He slapped a blank tape into the punching device and his fingers flickered too fast to watch as he stamped his own questions into the wire. In seconds he was back at the computer.

Nobody moved. The mind was dazzled, trying to follow his speed. Only the computer seemed fast enough to keep pace with him, and he bent over the typewriter of the machine tautly, one machine communing with its kinsman, and the two of them so infinitely faster than flesh and blood

that the men could only stand staring.

Nobody breathed. Conway—because thought is so fast—had time to say to himself with enormous hopefulness, “He’ll find out the answer. He’ll take over now. When the new assault starts he’ll handle it and win, and I can stop trying any more. . . .”

The stream of printed answers began to pour out under the typewriter bar, and Ego bent to read. The bright cone of his sight bathed the paper. Then with a gesture that was savage as a man’s, he ripped off the tape as if he were tearing out a tongue that had spoken intolerable words. And Conway knew the computer had failed them, Ego had failed, Conway had gambled and lost.

The robot straightened up and faced the machines. His steel hands shot out in a furious, punishing motion, ready to rip the computers apart as he had already ripped the other machines which had failed him.

Conway in a voice of infinite disillusion said, “Ego, wait. It’s all right.”

As always when you spoke its name, the robot paused and turned. And faster than data through the computers there poured through Conway’s mind a torrent of linking thoughts. He saw his own image reflected upon the robot’s body, himself imprisoned in the reflection as Ego was jailed in a task impossible to achieve.

He realized that he understood the robot as no one else alive could do, because only he knew the same tensions. It was something the computers couldn’t deduce. But it was something Conway had partly guessed all along, and forbidden himself to recognize until the last alternative failed and he had to think for himself.

Win the war was the robot’s basic drive. But he had to act on incomplete information, like Conway himself, and that meant that Ego had to assume responsibility for making wrong decisions that might lose the war, which he was not allowed to do. Neither could he shift responsibility as the computers could, saying, “No answer—insufficient data.” Nor could he take refuge in neurosis or madness or surrender. Nor in passing the duty on to someone

else, as Conway had tried to do. So all he could do was seek more knowledge furiously, almost at random, and all he could want was—

"I know what you want," Conway said. "You can have it. I'll take over, Ego. You can stop wanting, now."

"*Want*—" the robot howled inhumanly, and paused as usual, and then rushed on for the first time to finish his statement, "*—to stop wanting!*"

"Yes," Conway said. "I know. So do I. But now you can stop, Ego. Turn yourself off. You did your best."

The hollow voice said much more softly, "Want to stop. . . ." And then hovering on the brink of silence, ". . . stop want. . . ." It ceased. The shivering stopped. A feel of violence seemed to die upon the air around the robot, as if intolerable tensions had relaxed at last inside it. There was a series of clear, deliberate clickings from the steel chest, as of metallic decisions irrevocably reached, one after another. And then something seemed to go out of the thing. It stood differently. It was a machine again. Nothing more than a machine.

Conway looked at his own face in the motionless reflection. The robot couldn't take it, he thought. No wonder. He couldn't even speak to ask for relief, because the opposite of *want* is *not want*, and when he said the first word, its negative forced him to want nothing, and so to be silent. No, we asked too much. He couldn't take it. Meeting his own eyes in the reflection, he wondered if he was speaking to the Conway of a long minute ago. Perhaps he was. That Conway couldn't take it either. But this one had to, and could.

Ego couldn't act on partial knowledge. No machine could. You can't expect machines to face the unknown. Only human beings can do that. Steel isn't strong enough. Only flesh and blood can do it, and go on.

"Well, now I know," he thought. And it seemed strange, but he wasn't as tired as he had been before. Always until now there had been Ego to fall back on if he had to, but something he must not try until he reached the last gasp. Well, now he had reached it. And Ego couldn't carry the

load.

He laughed gently to himself. The thought that had chilled him came back and he looked at it calmly. Maybe *win the war* was impossible. Maybe that paradox was what had stopped Ego. But Conway was human. It didn't stop him. He could accept the thought and push it aside, knowing that sometimes humans really do achieve the impossible. Maybe that was all that had kept them going this long.

Conway turned his head slowly and looked at Broome.

"Know what I'm going to do?" he asked.

Broome shook his head, the bright eyes watchful.

"I'm going to bed," Conway said. "I'm going to sleep. I know my limitations now. The other side's only flesh and blood too. They have the same problems we have. They have to sleep too. You can wake me up when the next attack starts. Then I'll handle it—or I won't. But I'll do my best and that's all anybody can do."

He moved stiffly past Ego toward the door, pausing for a moment to touch his palm against the motionless steel chest. It felt cold and not very steady against his hand.

"What do I mean, *only* flesh and blood?" he asked.

THE YEAR'S S-F

A Summation by the Editor

THIS WAS THE YEAR the house collapsed. The house of cards, I mean, otherwise known as the Science Fiction Boom. It's been rough all over, and I *don't* mean only since the pieces began to blow off the top, a couple-three years back; I mean almost from the beginning, since five years ago, when the structure first began to climb precariously higher than its foundations could support.

There were plenty of reasons for the collapse, but none that couldn't have been predicted—none that weren't inherent in the build-up. *Part* of what happened was that science-fantasy got caught in the post-war publishing mushroom (two kinds of mushroom: the kind that grows up overnight, and the kind that makes a big noise—"Boom!"—and blows away in the air). As it happened, just when paper-supplies were loosening up, and people were finding time to read again, the public was discovering some irritating complexities and confusions in the Wonderful Post-War World. Seeking both explanation and escape, readers bought a record number of "How To" books, and scientific popularizations; and at the same time sought the solace of an old companion of hard times and inner turmoil—fantasy. And the experiences of the war itself, five years full of Marvellous Inventions and Heroes of Science, had prepared the reading public to accept—or at least be introduced to—the bastard infant of the union of these forms: science-fiction. (Now that the wedding has been officially sanctioned, there is another, legitimate, offspring of popular science and literary mysticism, the "How To Have Happier Dreams," school, regularly appearing on all best-seller lists.)

The *Boom!*, both in s-f and in publishing generally, was

most noticeable in paperback books and in magazines. New companies blossomed like dandelions; new titles covered the news-stands and smothered the drugstores, until the quantity of sheer trash and the bewildering variety of choice, inevitably, made a weeding-out period necessary.

The s-f *Boom!* started later, and lasted longer, than was generally true for the industry. It was 1953 when the bottom fell out of publishing, but for some time after that, s-f continued (comparatively speaking) to flourish—not as it had in the peak year, but still holding better than its own.

There was a reason. In all the excitement, science-fantasy actually *had* grown from an esoteric specialty field to a small, but solid, “category,” of interest to a significant portion of the general reading public. It didn’t, as some of its prophets had loudly proclaimed, put mysteries and westerns out of the running; it *did* establish a small shelf for itself, beside them.

In the summer of 1955, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, which had been (as I recall it) the first of the serious critical journals to accord recognition to science-fantasy, apparently decided it had a corpse on its hands. Somewhat embarrassed, they engaged a pair of literary undertakers to dispose of the matter for them. These two gentlemen, Siegfried Mandel, an English instructor at Brooklyn Polytechnic, and Peter Fingesten, a sculptor and authority on “world symbolism,” produced an article entitled, “The Myth of Science Fiction.” In it, (as is frequent in funeral addresses), they chose to ignore the erratic behavior of the last few years of the subject’s life, and confined their comments largely to the period of infancy. (This extreme is less customary.)

In any event, the co-authors of this higher criticism managed to produce an admirable analysis of what-was-wrong with s-f twenty years ago, and explained adequately why it could never have become a popular fiction-form at that time, addressed as it was to a limited group of intellectual frustrates with technocratic political leanings, and no social leanings whatsoever.

They buried the wrong corpse; but perhaps we should thank them for doing it. Science-fantasy has long outgrown both its worship of machines and its fear of emotion. Where emphasis once was on the mechanical sciences, it has shifted now to the psychological; where Scientific Progress was once the unquestioned goal, the more usual objective now is *to question* just what *sort* of progress might offer the most satisfaction for human needs.

S-f, today, has found a valid and permanent place for itself on the contemporary literary scene. Just *what* that place may be has been the subject of considerable debate. For me, the location was pointed out most clearly in the introductory comments made by the editors of an eminently readable recent collection (no relation to science-fiction), "New Campus Writing," (Bantam, 1955).

Messrs. Nolan Miller and Judson Jerome noted that the submissions they received for consideration were both plentiful and varied—with one exception: "There would seem to be little probing by campus writers into the relation of man to machine, man to society, man to the universe of the atom." And a little later: "We are puzzled that the issues of our times—science, technology, politics, starvation of the mind and body—figure only slightly, if at all . . . we find people in twos and threes; we examine individuals in the process of discovering themselves—finding the terms by which they can live in the world without changing it."

I believe this is true of a very large part of the best modern literature. And it is *this* gap that science-fantasy fills. This is precisely what the authors in this book *have* done. And that there is a place for it, readers looking for it, is clearly evidenced by the position of the field today—after the *Boom*!

Seven years ago, just before it all started, there were only two regular monthly magazines in this country, publishing original (not reprint) science-fiction: *Astounding*, which was then, as earlier, (and still) a first-rate magazine; and *Amazing Stories*, which was then a "pulp" devoted almost exclusively to exploring Lemuria under the guid-

ance of one Richard Shaver. There were five other magazines then publishing original s-f, all bi-monthlies or quarterlies.

Today, there are thirteen s-f magazines appearing in this country: five regular monthlies, four each of quarterlies and bi-monthlies. Eight of these, at least, are good magazines, that may confidently be expected to remain in good health.

Amazing Stories, as of the beginning of 1956, has become a monthly again; this one is for fast action, plot, and pace—though not profundity.

Astounding, which has never faltered in schedule or quality, continues to be directed primarily to the engineer-reader and devotee of the true problem-story.

Fantastic Universe; also monthly. If the science-fiction in here is sometimes weak, the fantasy can almost always be relied upon to be first-rate.

Fantasy & Science Fiction; monthly. The unquestioned leader in the field for literary quality, for innovations in form, and for intelligent humor.

Galaxy is the s-f "slick" (as F&SF might be called the "little magazine" of the field). A number of first-rate authors who are too seldom seen elsewhere appear here regularly. Monthly.

If offers a very satisfying selection of solid well-written "genuine science-fiction." Seldom spectacular; always good; no specialized emphasis. Bi-monthly.

Infinity is too new to have acquired a "personality" of its own—but it shows promise of becoming one of the better magazines. Bi-monthly—but only for the time being, I expect.

Science Fiction Stories, a bi-monthly, is published in conjunction with *Science Fiction Quarterly*; they are different in size and price; otherwise, they may be considered as one magazine, with ten issues the year. Notable primarily for the excellent feature material; quality of the fiction is erratic, but its content is often gratifyingly off-trail.

The bulk of the stories included in this collection, and

in the *Honorable Mentions* list, were selected from these and other s-f specialty magazines. In addition, I had three main sources of material:—

1) *Magazines outside the specialty field*: In 1955, *Bluebook*, *Esquire*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Colliers*, *Playboy*, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*, (in approximate order of the quantity published) contained between them perhaps thirty or forty s-f stories (depending on where you draw the line between science-fantasy and just-plain fantasy). Half again that number were scattered among such an unlikely combination as *The Reporter*, *PEN* (The Public Employees' News), *The American Magazine*, *Cats*, (for cat-lovers), and others.

2) *Books*: There is comparatively little original short-story material appearing in book-form, but this year there were two hard-cover collections of more-than-ordinary interest: J. B. Priestley's "The Other Place," (Harper's), and Bertrand Russell's "Nightmares of Eminent Persons" (Simon & Schuster). In paperbacks, there was the annual "Star" collection from Ballantine; one volume of regrettable originals published by Signet; and at least one new story per book in Ballantine's collections of Chad Oliver, Kuttner-Moore, and Sturgeon.

3) *British magazines*. There are four of these now regularly appearing. I liked the bi-monthly *Science-Fantasy* the best, but all are surprisingly good, with a much higher average quality than is to be found in the American magazines. *New Worlds* and *Authentic* are both monthlies; *Nebula* is bi-monthly.

I have not attempted to cover any foreign-language magazines, but it is of interest to note that there are s-f publications now appearing in a good many other countries. Among them, to my limited knowledge, are Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan.

One further source of material, not represented in this book, but surveyed for it, were the "fan" magazines, published by readers and aspiring writers of s-f. Fiction and essays of unexpectedly high calibre are printed in several of these, most notably in one offset and rather arty item

called *Inside*.

All stories under 20,000 words in length originally published for the first time in 1955 were eligible for consideration—that is, if *either* the copyright date or magazine issue-date was 1955. Ideally, we'd have preferred to be guided entirely by copyright date; but it is not always possible to obtain copies of forthcoming January and February issues early enough. As a result, this volume and the one for 1956 will overlap on certain issues. No story was excluded from consideration on account of previous condition of reprint—but I am afraid they *were* discriminated against.

Stories were selected for a combination of idea-content (and development) and literary virtue . . . but also with the awareness that, put together in a book, they had to provide some variety and contrast for the reader. Thus, some pieces had to be regretfully excluded, because there was a better example of *the same type* available. Others that might have been included were dropped if anything of similar quality and kind could be had that had *not* been previously reprinted. A very few that I might have liked to use were unavailable due to previous publishing commitments. For the most part, editors and publishers were marvellously kind about releasing rights, in view of the special nature of this collection.

This seems a good time to express my intense gratitude to the editors, in and out of the s-f field, who gave me assistance and cooperation beyond any reasonable expectation, helping me to procure stories and advance copies of future issues, and to locate and contact authors. Among these, my especial thanks are due to Mr. Anthony Boucher; Mr. John W. Campbell, Jr.; Mr. Robert W. Lowndes; Mr. Leo Margulies; and Mr. Robert P. Mills.

My warm appreciation, also, to agents Harry Altshuler, Larry Harris, and Forrest J. Ackerman, all of whom expressed interest and offered assistance quite beyond the call of profit . . . and to the great number of s-f enthusiasts, both “fans” and colleagues, who offered suggestions and encouragement. I wish I could name them all here, but it would need another book, I think, to complete the list.

Finally, I want to extend my personal thanks, for aid and assistance of many kinds, to Mr. Stephen L. Wood, Mr. and Mrs. Damon Knight, Mr. Milton Amgott, Miss Katherine MacLean, and to Mr. Knox Burger.

—*Judith Merrill*

HONORABLE MENTION

The stories listed below are those that, for a variety of reasons, could not be reprinted in this book—yet seemed to me to be too good to be entirely ignored. I have included several pieces too long to have been considered for this volume at all, but which have appeared only in magazine versions, and so are not available for the recognition they have earned in any other area of review. Wherever possible, I have given book titles, rather than original magazine sources, simply because books are easier to obtain. Stories from magazines dated 1956, but copyright 1955, are not listed here, as they are still eligible for inclusion next year. In order to save space, I have made use of a number of abbreviations, which are explained immediately below.

ABBREVIATIONS:

ASF—*Astounding Science Fiction*

FU—*Fantastic Universe*

F&SF—*Fantasy And Science Fiction*

GSF—*Galaxy Science Fiction*

SFS—*Science Fiction Stories*

"GoG"—*"Galaxy of Ghouls," (anthology) ed.: J. Merril; Lion*

"F&SF:5"—*"The Best From Fantasy and Science Fiction: Fifth Series," (anthology) ed.: A. Boucher; Doubleday*

"Str3"—*"Star Science Fiction Stories, #3," (anthology of original stories) ed.: F. Pohl; Ballantine*

ROBERT ABERNATHY: "Single Combat," *F&SF*, 1/55.

BRIAN W. ALDISS: "Our Kind of Knowledge," *New Worlds*, 6/55.

STEPHEN ARR: "Cause," *F&SF*, 8/55.

RAYMOND E. BANKS: "The Ear-Friend," *SFS*, 3/55; "The Short Ones," *F&SF*, 3/55.

CHARLES BEAUMONT: "The Vanishing American," in "*F&SF:5*."

JAMES BLISH: "King Of The Hill," *Infinity*, 11/55; "With Malice To Come," *F&SF*, 5/55

ROBERT BLOCH: "You Could Be Wrong," *Amazing Stories*, 3/55.

FREDRIC BROWN: "Blood," in "*GoG*"

ALGIS BUDRYS: "Citadel," *ASF*, 2/55; "The Two Sharp Edges," *SFS*, 1/55; "Thing," (*ps: Janvier*), *FU*, 3/55.

KENNETH BULMER: "The Day Of The Monster," *Authentic S. F.*, 7/55.

JAMES CAUSEY: "Snakerdwrap," *Other Worlds*, 7/55.

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER: "Late," *Science Fantasy*, #13.

JOHN CHRISTOPHER: "Manna," *New Worlds*, 3/55.

ARTHUR C. CLARKE: "The Deep Range," in "*Str3*."

LES COLE: "The Wilhelm Spot," *SFS*, 7/55.

LEE CORREY: "Design Flaw," *ASF*, 2/55.

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP: "Lament By A Maker," (*verse*), *F&SF*, 1/55.

PHILIP K. DICK: "Captive Market," *If*, 4/55; "Foster, You're Dead," in "*Str3*".

GORDON DICKSON: "James," *F&SF*, 5/55; "The Odd Ones," *If*, 2/55; "Moon, June, Spoon, Croon," *Startling Stories*, Summer/55.

HENRY GREGOR FELSEN: "The Spaceman Cometh," *Colliers*, 11/11/55.

GORDON GASKO: "The Golden Judge," *ASF*, 12/55.

HUGO GERNSBACH: "The Electronic Duel," *Esquire*, 5/55.

JAMES E. GUNN: "Name Your Pleasure," *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, Winter/55.

FRANK HERBERT: "Under Pressure," (*serial*) *ASF*, 11, 12/55 & 1/56.

ALICE ELEANOR JONES: "Miss Quatro," *FU*, 6/55; "Recruiting Officer," *Fantastic*, 10/55; "Created He Them," in "*F&SF:5*"

MARTIN JORDAN: "Sheamus," *Science Fantasy*, #14.

MURRAY LEINSTER: "Sand Doom," *ASF*, 12/55.

JOHN D. MACDONALD: "Virus H," *Bluebook*, 6/55.

RICHARD MATHESON: "Dance Of The Dead," in "*Str3*"; "Pattern For Survival," in "*F&SF:5*."

J. FRANCES MCCOMAS: "Criminal Negligence," *ASF*, 6/55.

J. T. M'INTOSH: "The Man Who Cried Sheep," *F&SF*, 9/55.

- THOMAS A. MEEHAN: "The Wind's Will," *F&SF*, 7/55.
- JUDITH MERRIL: "Project Nursemaid," *F&SF*, 10/55.
- SAM MERWIN, JR.: "The Man From The Flying Saucer," *FU*, 7/55.
- WALTER M. MILLER, JR.: "A Canticle For Leibowitz," in "*F&SF* 5"; "The Triffin' Man," in "GoG"; "The Darfstellar," *ASF*, 1/55.
- WILLIAM MORRISON: "Hiding Place," *FU*, 6/55.
- DUNCAN H. MUNRO: "Tieline," *ASF*, 7/55.
- ALAN E. NOURSE: "The Expert Touch," *F&SF*, 11/55; "Grand Rounds," *FU*, 8/55.
- CHAD OLIVER: "The Mother Of Necessity," "Artifact," and "Another Kind," all in the book, "Another Kind," (Ballantine, 1955).
- CHAD OLIVER & CHARLES BEAUMONT: "The Last Word," in "*F&SF* 5"
- GERALD PEARCE: "The Dreaming Wall," *GSF*, 5/55.
- FREDERIK POHL: "The Tunnel Under The World," *GSF*, 1/55.
- ARTHUR PORGES: "The Tidings," *F&SF*, 2/55.
- J. B. PRIESTLEY: "Uncle Phil On TV," in "The Other Place," (Harper's, 1955).
- MACK REYNOLDS: "All The World Loves A Luvver," *F&SF*, 4/55.
- FRANK RILEY: "The Cyber And Justice Holmes," *If*, 3/55.
- ERIC FRANK RUSSELL: "Allamagoosa," *AFS*, 5/55.
- RAY RUSSELL: "The Pleasure Was Ours," *Imagination*, 5/55.
- WILLIAM SANSOM: "The Tournament," *F&SF*, 1/55.
- JAMES H. SCHMITZ: "The Ties Of Earth," *GSF*, 11/55 & 1/56.
- ARTHUR SELLINGS: "Jukebox," *FU*, 12/55; "The Proxies," *If*, 10/55.
- JOHN A. SENTRY: "Aspirin Won't Help It," *ASF*, 9/55.
- ROBERT SHECKLEY: "Spy Story," *Playboy*, 9/55; "Deadhead," *GSF*, 7/55.
- CLIFFORD SIMAK: "Full Cycle," *SFS*, 11/55.
- CORDWAINER SMITH: "The Game Of Rat And Dragon," *GSF*, 10/55.
- EVELYN E. SMITH: "Teragram," *FU*, 6/55.
- THEODORE STURGEON: "The Widget, The Wadget, And Boff," (serial) *F&SF*, 11, 12/55; "Twink," *GSF*, 8/55.
- JOHN F. SUTER: "The Seeds Of Murder," *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/55.
- E. C. TUBB: "The Predators," *Science Fantasy*, #15; "Quis Custodiet," *Nebula*, 11/55.
- F. L. WALLACE: "End As A World," *GSF*, 9/55.
- BRYCE WALTON: "The Midway," *F&SF*, 2/55; "Freeway," *If*, 6/55.
- MANLY WADE WELLMAN: "Walk Like A Mountain," *F&SF*, 6/55.

THE SKY'S

NO LIMIT...

... to the adventure and excitement, the sheer reading pleasure, you will find in this selection of the very best of science-fantasy ... culled from more than a thousand stories published in books and magazines during the past year.

**ROBERT ABERNATHY • DAMON KNIGHT
JACK FINNEY • ZENNA HENDERSON
KUTTNER & MOORE • JAMES E. GUNN
WILLARD MARSH • E. C. TUBB
MARK CLIFTON • MILDRED CLINGGERMAN
AVRAM DAVIDSON • R. R. MERLISS
ALGIS BUDRYS • WALTER M. MILLER JR.**

The contents have been selected by an editor whose name is a synonym for taste and quality in the field ... Miss Judith Merrill. The introduction is by Mr. Orson Welles.